CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE

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SKELLY

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CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE FOR SISTERHOODS

IN FOUR VOLUMES

BY

THE REV. A. M. SKELLY. O.P.

VOLUME III

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FOREWORD

"Blessed be God in His gifts!"

It was the Royal Prophet that first gave utterance to those words, and the same expression of thankfulness to God wells up from my poor heart as I consign to the publishers this fifth volume of Spiritual Conferences to Religious.

When I began this work several years ago, my literary ambition as well as my knowledge of the spiritual life was limited, and I thought if I could conduct the consecrated spouses of God amid the thorny paths of the ascetic life, I should have done a work pleasing to the Master, leaving to more spiritual and enlightened minds the task of conducting them to the sublime heights of the spiritual way.

I feel grateful to God that He has prolonged my years to see issued from the press this fifth volume the first on the mystic life, and the compilation in good part of the second, the last of those volumes, and the completion of the whole work.

Earnest souls who take up a life-profession are not satisfied till they master the whole content of the craft or science to which they devote themselves, and religious also who have vowed themselves to a life of perfection will not be content till they have studied the whole science of sainthood, as exemplified and taught by the masters. I think that the study of those conferences will show that that science in its entirety will have been given in outline in those volumes, and that in good part, in the words of the teachers themselves.

In this conviction and with an earnest request for the prayers of my readers I for the present lay down my pen, humbly trusting that the merciful God will reward me for the many fatiguing hours given to this work, which was for me above all things a labor of love.

A. M. S.

Christmas, 1929.

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CONFERENCES ON THE INTERIOR LIFE

VOLUME THREE

THE MYSTIC LIFE

FIRST BOOK

THE UNION OF THE SOUL WITH GOD

FIRST CONFERENCE

Nature of the Union of the Soul with God (I)

1. Before entering on the study of the high and abstruse phenomena pertaining to the mystic life of the soul, it is good for us to have a clear and accurate knowledge of the end and the term of the Interior Life. That end, that term, is the most perfect possible union of the soul with God.

The ultimate perfection of all beings consists in this, that each one of them returns according to its nature to the principle whence it originated; for the principle has all the perfections of the effect, and more besides.

Now God, the Sovereign Good, is the supreme cause of all creatures, and these by the impression they received from Him, return to Him by a complete circle. This return, it is true, is imperfect and indirect in beings deprived of reason. God conducts them towards a particular end that is proper to them. They do not return directly and immediately to their first principle. Nevertheless, they approach God by a similitude more or less great, according to the degree they hold in the scale of beings.

For us, intelligent creatures, the return to God is direct and immediate. God is our first principle; He is our last end. He created us through love; He excites us to return to Him by love; and He impresses on us this love which draws us to Him as to the Sovereign Good. Our life from beginning to end is, so to speak, an admirable circulation of divine love. Now it is the privilege of the love of charity to unite us to God, the source of all goodness and perfection. This union with God, it is true, remains imperfect on earth; but it is the principle and the pledge of the consummated union that awaits us in Heaven.

2. Without speaking of the divine union by the light of glory, there are two sorts of union with God outside of sanctifying grace and of charity—namely, the natural union, and the supernatural union, begun or imperfect.

The natural union of the soul with God consists in this, that God unites Himself in a certain manner to all beings by His power, His presence, and His essence. By His power, because all things are subject to Him; by His presence, because all things are naked and open to His eyes; by His essence, because, being infinite, He is present everywhere as the first and efficient cause of all that exists. This natural union is greater still in intelligent beings; for, "the Word is the light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world." (John i, 9.)

This light exercises on the soul a particular influence as universal cause, a thing that cannot take place without a sort of union. In the natural order the perfection of intelligent beings consists in union with God by natural knowledge and love.

The supernatural union, commenced or imperfect, consists in the adhesion of the soul to God by faith and hope, even though charity be wanting. In fact, faith and hope attach us to God as the principles whence all our goods derive; faith, as to a principle that makes known to us the truth; hope, as to a principle that puts us in possession of a perfect good and gives an efficacious help to obtain beatitude. In faith and hope separated from charity we adhere to God, it is true, but not for His own sake. The intimate union of divine love does not yet exist. There is in the acts of these two virtues only a commenced or imperfect union. They are, nevertheless, precious graces, which put us in immediate relation with the Sovereign Good, and prepare us for the perfect union of charity. We must observe: the two sorts of union of which we speak have not the perfection necessary to constitute friendship and compenetration in a common life; charity alone can produce this effect.

3. The union of the soul with God by sanctifying grace consists in a true and real participation in the nature and the life of God. Sanctifying grace, in truth, is a quality of the divine order, which is so intimate and adherent that it fulfills in the soul raised to the super-

natural order functions analogous to those of the natural form itself. In other words, just as the soul is the principle of life and motion to the body, so grace is the principle of the supernatural life and action to the soul. It is an admirable and permanent gift which makes us by participation what God is by nature. The divine life in us is then founded in sanctifying grace. It is an elevation of the soul affecting immediately its substance and imparting to it a new being, a new nature, which becomes in the soul the principle of a life which by itself belongs only to God.

In order to act supernaturally, we must first have a supernatural being. Charity and the infused habits, inseparable accompaniment of sanctifying grace, simultaneously perfect our powers and raise them to the supernatural order. All then is made divine in us, our nature and our principles of operation. Such is the union of the soul with God by sanctifying grace and the infused habits, according to Blessed Albert the Great, with whom all other mystic authors agree. "Charity," he says, "unites us to God, and transforms us into God; it causes us to adhere to God, and makes us one sole spirit with Him. Love can be at peace only in the entire and pacific possession of the beloved object. It is thus that the love of charity unites God to man, and man to God, for God dwells not in hearts where charity is absent. If we have charity, we possess God, because God is charity." There is nothing stronger than charity. It gives itself no rest till it penetrates efficaciously and totally into the inmost region of the soul and arrives as far as possible at unity.

Such is the union of the soul with God by sanctifying grace and charity. This union renders God so present to us that if, by an impossibility, He were not naturally in us by His power, presence, and essence, He would be so really by this supernatural means. It is difficult to enter farther into this mystery, whose depth escapes our investigations here below. Let us add a word, however. The soul is, then, united to God as to the object of her knowledge and love, not solely in an ordinary and natural manner, as happens when we know or when we love, being destitute of charity; but in a much more strong and intimate manner by a principle of grace, and in virtue of a participation in the divine life; that is to say, by all the bonds of a true friendship—mutual adherence, which effects that the beloved object is in the loving subject, and the loving subject is in the beloved object. God, the true Sun of Justice, darts His rays into the justified soul as into a crystal pure and limpid. He imprints on her His image and imparts to her His properties; or, rather, after the manner of fire which warms, penetrates, and inflames iron, He renders the soul like to Himself by a participation of His own form.

Is it necessary to add that by this supernatural union we are made the adopted children of God and the co-heirs of Jesus Christ? Since also by the production of sanctifying grace in the soul of the just there is a real and substantial presence of God, the whole Trinity dwells in and unites itself to us, according to the word of St. John (John xiv, 23): "If anyone love Me, . . . We will come to him and make our abode with him."

In truth, if only the Son and the Holy Ghost are sent, as we shall see hereafter when we come to speak of the invisible divine missions, nevertheless, whoever receives the Son and the Holy Ghost, also receives the Father; for the three Divine Persons are inseparable.

4. Massoulié sums up the important question

of the union of the soul with God by sanctifying grace. "Grace," he says, "is the foundation of the whole supernatural order. It must of necessity be a participation of the divine nature. Oh, inconceivable dignity of the Christian! Every Christian is a participant of the divine nature. Can we imagine anything grander?" And it must of necessity be that man is enriched with this privilege, because, as St. Thomas, after St. Denis, says, "In order to be able to produce spiritual operations, we must have a spiritual nature; and, to speak universally, one cannot have operations of a nature without participating in that nature." Behold the grace that sanctifies us and makes us Christians! It is a participation of the divine nature, and, by consequence, the principle of the supernatural and divine operations of the knowledge and love, and of the possession of God in Himself. For it is solely for this end that God has communicated to us this precious and admirable gift of participating in His nature—in such sort that now man, being raised to an order so noble, ought no longer to have any other rule of action than the Divinity in which he participates; for it is no longer a man, it is a God by participation that acts.

How few Christians will be found if we are to recognize them by this rule! It is, nevertheless, what we must follow if we wish to bear truly the name of Christian.

SECOND CONFERENCE

Nature of the Union of the Soul with God
(II)

I

1. In our last conference we sought to point out what was the end and term of the interior life, and we found that that end and term is the most perfect union of the soul with God.

But this information, however sweet and ennobling, does not satisfy our minds ever seeking out still greater light and knowledge, and we are urged to inquire further, (1) whether there are degrees in this union; (2) whether our Lord Jesus Christ is present in us by His Sacred Humanity; and, (3) in what consist the communications which theologians call the *divine invisible missions* of the Son and of the Holy Ghost?

As to the first question, let me say that there are degrees in the union of the soul with God by sanctifying grace and charity, and that the degrees of this union are very diverse.

The union of the soul with God is in truth *essentially* the same in all the living members of Jesus Christ. It is neither more nor less great in this sense that all those who possess charity are united to the Sovereign Good and participate in His life. They remain in God, and God, on His side, dwells in them as in His temples. Nevertheless, the measure fixed by the divine will causes a great diversity in the degrees of the divine union by charity, "for grace has been given to each one according to the measure of the gifts of Jesus Christ" (Eph. iv, 7), in order to the complete building up of His mystical body. The dispositions and co-operation of souls are also, it is true, among the causes of this diversity in the degrees of the divine union by charity: But we must acknowledge, the first and principal cause is God. In fact, it is God who prepares our free will, and from this point of view, our dispositions occupy only a secondary rank, although they are and remain, in practice, one of the indispensable conditions of our spiritual advancement.

2. In answer to the second question I reply

that Jesus Christ, *as Man,* is, properly speaking, only in Heaven, where He is seated on the right hand of His Father, and in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. The Sacred Humanity of our Lord is present in the just soul *only by His action.* It is not, then, a real presence, like that of Jesus Christ in a consecrated Host. We cannot assimilate those two presences so different in their nature and in their end. In the Blessed Sacrament Jesus Christ is substantially and entirely present in each consecrated Host to be the spiritual and divine nourishment of our souls. In the depth of our heart He is present as the principle and foundation of our supernatural life. We cannot say, then, that the Sacred Humanity is in us as it is in Heaven. This would be to open the gate to the error of the "Ubiquitists," who would have Jesus Christ as Man everywhere, even as is His Godhead.

3. The difficulties as to this real presence of our Lord in us, as in the Holy Sacrament, or as in Heaven, do not come, as has been erroneously said, from certain incomplete philosophic or theological formulas. Even in modern times, Catholic philosophers and theologians have not permitted themselves to give utter-

ance to base and terrestrial ideas in contemplating the Word Incarnate, Saviour and Life-giver of our souls, present in us *by His action.* The saints themselves have found that this mysterious presence of Jesus in souls suffices in this world for their tenderness and love.

Indeed, the proximity of individuals does not always render their presence efficacious; but, rather, mutual conversation and reciprocal help.

Two persons blind and deaf, even when together, cannot communicate with each other and are as if they were widely apart. Two others, on the contrary, who have good sight and hearing, can carry on relations with each other at a certain distance and give help to each other in need, a thing that renders them efficaciously present to each other. Thus, the faithful soul, united otherwise to the Son of God, lifts herself in spirit to Heaven, to the foot of the Word Incarnate, persuaded that she enters into conversation with Him and receives from Him a powerful assistance.

It is without doubt difficult to explain the mode of action of the Sacred Humanity in souls. This is a mystery of love, the exposition of which introduces the most difficult questions of metaphysics and theology and which we, therefore, must leave to the theologians.

What is important for us to affirm here is the incontrovertible presence of the Sacred Humanity in us by a *mysterious action.* The Godman, Jesus Christ, in the words of the Gospel, "abideth in us, and we in Him." This suffices for our faith and love.

II

1. Let me finally go on to say in what consist the communications and sanctifying visits of God which theologians call the *divine invisible missions,* and what we must do to merit them.

The communications and the sanctifying visits called *divine invisible missions* are new supernatural lights which the Word communicates to our intelligence, and growing impressions of divine love with which the Holy Ghost favors our will. They are a resemblance and an extension of the eternal processions of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. We distinguish two sorts of divine missions—the visible and the invisible. We have here to occupy ourselves only with the latter. But first, let us give some explanations, which will enable us to comprehend better, and better appraise those infinitely precious divine operations.

2. First of all, there are two eternal processions in the Godhead. The Son proceeds from the Father by immanent Sonship. It is at the same time the exemplar of the supernatural knowledge we have of God in this life and in the other. The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son as the term of the imminent operation of the will and of the love of God. It is the exemplar of the supernatural love of angels and of men. Now it is on those two uncreated models that God resolved to form souls in the supernatural order.

Not content with imparting to them a very perfect resemblance to His divine being by sanctifying grace, and to His powers by the infused habits, He operates in their favor the two temporal missions of the Son and the Holy Ghost, which are *images and extensions* of the eternal processions of the Godhead. It is in reality only the Son and the Holy Ghost that are sent.

Meanwhile, as the three Divine Persons are inseparable, and sanctifying grace is the fundamental reason of the presence of the Holy

Trinity in souls, he who receives the Son and the Holy Ghost receives the Father also. The Father cannot be sent, because, as first Person of the Most Holy Trinity, He proceeds not from the Son nor from the Holy Ghost. Nevertheless, we can attribute to Him a rôle in the work of the creation of supernatural man. For, although the title of Father in regard to man belongs to all three Divine Persons, it is fitting to say, by appropriation, that the First Person of the Holy Trinity, principle of the other two Persons, engenders us to the life of grace in giving us a participation in the Divine Nature.

The generation by adoption in fact imitates the generation by nature. But this attribution, which Christian piety loves to find in the Heavenly Father, leaves intact the truth we have expounded here, that there are only two divine invisible missions.

Secondly, if the Son and the Holy Ghost are by a certain appropriation the objects of our knowledge and love, they are also the principles of the acts that correspond to them. As objects they are present so that we may enjoy them. As principles they cause us to produce together with them acts of the same nature by participation, and which are in line with the immanent operations of God.

This is why, although the Son and the Holy Ghost are inseparable, we can say, by appropriation, that the Person of the Son is sent to the intelligence, and the Person of the Holy Ghost, to the will. For the rest, it is certain that charity and the infused habits that are given us to raise our intelligence and our will to a supernatural knowledge and love, are never without the active presence of the Divine Persons, to whom we remain united and of whom our intelligence and our will are the striking images.

It results from all this that the Son and the Holy Ghost are sent into our souls not only as principles of the supernatural life, but also as principles of supernatural operations. The more those divine missions are reiterated, the more do we make progress in the union with God, and the more do we approach to the divine resemblance. This appears to us proved and incontestable.

3. Let us come now to the practical and truly consoling side of the question: Can we in some manner draw on ourselves new divine missions? Of this there can be no doubt.

Every time a Christian soul by her fervor and generosity comes to merit a growth of sanctifying grace and charity, and makes new progress in this grace and this charity, the Son and the Holy Ghost are sent anew and belong to her with rights and prerogatives of a more eminent degree. These invisible missions of the Divine Persons take place, then, as often as the Christian soul advances and perfects herself in charity even when this would be at each moment. These are the mysterious ascensions that God operates in the heart and that cause the just soul to pass from a holy state to one more perfect still, as would be, for example, from the purgative to the illuminative life, and from this again to the unitive. Every increase of charity obtains and draws those divine invisible missions, and in particular the most generous acts, those that approach to heroism, such as the great victories one gains over the world, the devil, and one's own perverse inclinations. We can say in particular that the generous practice of renunciation and abnegation is a sovereignly efficacious means to draw God into us.

This truth of the renewal of the divine missions is, we must acknowledge, one of the motives the most capable of exciting souls to make solid and serious progress in the life of union with God.

By this thought of faith, those who commence to give themselves to God are encouraged in the conflict against the obstacles to the interior life; those who advance in virtue conceive a noble emulation in the way of spiritual progress; finally, the perfect find in it the confirmation of their generosity in the midst of the greatest sacrifices. By this thought of faith the soul becomes more fervent and is led to produce more perfect acts, so that, growing in grace and charity, she may draw God into her anew by a still more intimate union.

THIRD CONFERENCE

The Fruitive Union of the Soul with God (I)

1. To-day we will treat of a high and important subject—the fruitive union of the soul with God. Now the fruitive union, of which we speak here, is not the fruitive union of Heaven. It is a fruitive union imperfect, though real, which we can enjoy in this world. Meanwhile, this imperfect union, as we shall explain later on, is more than ordinary. It puts on an exceptional and very intimate character. Certain authors, considering the hidden and secret marvels of this union, call it the *"Mystic Union."* Others name it the *"Earthly Paradise."* After the example of Thomas of Valgornera and many great mystic theologians, we shall call it *"Fruitive Union."* Whatever be the name that is given it, we now come to describe it.

We must first of all remark that there are two sorts of union with God, the one, habitual; the other, actual. The *habitual* union (*i. e.,* by sanctifying grace) is common to all the just.

It is a real union, but entirely under the shadow of faith. The *actual* union is brought about in two ways. The first has for immediate principle charity and the other infused virtues, as well as, to a certain degree, the gifts of the Holy Ghost. This is the common actual union of just souls. The second actual union is a special effect of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and principally the gifts of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding. It is an actual grace, superior and very perfect, an intense divine light, a lively and profound sense of the presence of God; in a word, a *fruitive union.* This *actual fruitive union* evidently supposes all the principles of the *actual common union* of which it is the perfection and the crown.

The fruitive union is not solely, then, the physical and real union of God with all beings by His essence, His presence, and His power. It is not, as certain false mystics advanced, an absorbent transformation of the soul into God. It is not solely the *habitual union* of the soul with God by sanctifying grace.

It is an *actual union* of a superior order. It is a vivid and profound sense of God present in us, excited by grace in such sort that under this supernatural, luminous, and delightful impression the soul cannot doubt of this divine presence. She knows that God is there, and she feels Him by the sweet experience of His presence. It is a commencement of the happiness of Heaven. We call this union *fruitive,* because it indicates a particular enjoyment of God by the intellect and the will.

2. Let me be permitted to give (after Massoulié) a doctrinal explanation, as complete as possible, of the fruitive union. This learned and pious author, after having shown how God operates in all beings by His presence, power, and essence, pursues his reasoning thus: "We must avow that this truth is capable of making a great impression on a soul that employs the lights of faith and reason in order to render herself familiar with it. She sees herself all filled with God. She considers herself not only as a fish in the ocean, or as a bird that cannot come out of the expanse of the air, but furthermore, she sees herself all penetrated with God to the very depth of her being. This thought causes her inexpressible joy. She unites herself to God with all her power. She embraces Him with all her heart, although she cannot see Him, and she does all that she can to have Him always present, a thing that

obliges her to hold herself in a profound respect, and, so to speak, annihilated before His infinite Being, knowing that this divine operation sustains her, and that if God ceased even for a moment, she would fall into nothingness.

"In this intimate presence, excited by grace, consists what the mystics call transformation, deification, or spiritual marriage. For it is not difficult to comprehend that the soul, being, so to speak, absorbed in the immensity of the Divine Essence, and being all penetrated with it, she is as a bar of iron penetrated by fire, or as the air penetrated by the rays of the sun. Her nature is not changed, but she is enkindled, enlightened, filled, and penetrated by God Himself. We can easily understand in what consists the spiritual marriage of God with the soul. It consists not only in the participation of His gifts of faith and love, but even more in the union and intimate presence of substance to substance. On earth all is passed in obscurity, although it is not faith alone that makes us believe it. Reason itself convinces us that this union is a necessary consequence of God's immensity, joined, however, with supernatural gifts. For if we spoke here only of the state of nature, and if there was not in it this return and this reciprocal union of love, God would be no more present to the soul than He is to all worldly things."

But it is in Heaven that this union will be fully consummated. There the soul will openly contemplate this operation of God in her. What would be the brilliancy of a mirror that not only received the rays of the sun, but was penetrated by the substance of the sun itself? What must be the rapture of a soul that sees herself, without loss to herself, all penetrated with the Godhead?

The soul, on her side, unites herself to God with all her strength, and it is this reciprocal union that makes the consummation of the divine marriage, through which she receives those gifts that hold for her the place of a dowry—vision, love, fruition. Vision responds to faith; love, to charity; fruition, to hope.

"We here explain, in rigorous theological terms, in what consists this spiritual marriage, of which not only mystic authors, but also the Fathers of the Church and Holy Scripture often speak. It is contracted on earth: it is consummated in Heaven. All the extraordinary graces that the just receive outside of the theological virtues are presents of the Divine

Spouse and pledges of the consummation. What is then, or what ought to be, the desire of this soul, fiancée and spouse of God, if not to arrive as soon as possible at a perfect union with Him, to possess Him, to see Him in all His glory, and to share this glory with Him forever?"

II

Here it might be asked: Does this fruitive union on earth ever become a permanent state? We answer, No! This union takes place in the contemplative act; it is, then, not a habit, a continual and perpetual sense, a stable and constant state. It is a transitory act of the intelligence and the will. This union takes its source in the habit of divine charity, but as such is only experimental and fruitive. It can be only a light and a taste, more or less transitory.

True, in the most perfect souls God sometimes manifests His presence almost continually, but in a manner very much less vivid and penetrating than in the fruitive union. It is an indefinite and confused sense, and, moreover, it is not permanent in the strict meaning of the term.

St. John of the Cross explains this state by comparing it with the sleep of the Beloved; the fruitive union is His delicious awakening. "To the soul that is raised to this high perfection," he says, "God is not hidden. She feels Him present within her. It is not surely as in those awakenings where, when they manifest themselves, it seems to the soul that the Beloved who slept in her bosom arises on a sudden from His sleep. She felt Him beforehand, it is true; she enjoyed His divine presence, but she enjoyed it as if He had been asleep in the most hidden folds of her interior. Oh, how happy is that soul to feel that God reposes peaceably in her bosom! He resides there habitually as asleep in the sweet embrace of the soul, and the soul feels Him perfectly, and ordinarily finds in Him ineffable delights. If He made Himself always felt to her as awake, He would impart to her ever new knowledge and new ardors, and this would be to enjoy by anticipation the glories of Heaven. If, in fact, by only once opening a little His divine eyes, He casts the soul into a state of intoxication, what would it be if He were continually and entirely awake?"

The continual and perpetual fruitive union is, then, not of this world; it is the condition of the saints in Heaven. The authors who call this union a stable and permanent state are to be interpreted according to the doctrine of St. John of the Cross, as cited.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The Fruitive Union of the Soul with God (II)

I

1. Having described what is the fruitive union of the soul with God and given a doctrinal explanation as complete as possible of it according to the learned Father Massoulié, we now go further and inquire whether there are different kinds of fruitive union.

Properly speaking, the fruitive union is always *passive.* It accompanies ordinarily infused contemplation in its diverse degrees. Practically, it is an *effective* union. It is distinguished in this from a certain *active* union which we can scarcely designate with exactitude by the name of a *fruitive* union. This *active* union is simply *affective* and is common to the three ways—the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive. The *effective* union, on the contrary, is the portion of souls arrived at the perfect and consummate union. There is a notable difference between the simply *affective* union, even the most perfect, and the *effective* union. The *affective* union, it is true, unites the soul to God by a love very ardent and delightful; but the soul has not yet attained to the source of light; whilst by the *effective* union the soul arrives at the consummation of the spiritual life, to the last possible limits of the union with God in this world.

This *effective* union can signify only one thing; it is that the soul loses all sentiment in regard to creatures, and that she puts on an affection truly divine, which, by analogy, after the manner of a form, deifies her mysteriously by love. Let us be permitted to cite in support of what we say an author who is very much esteemed.

"There is," says Father Honorius of St. Mary, "a great difference between the *affective* union, considered even in its most perfect degree, and the *effective* or *real union.* The former, it is true, unites and transforms the soul in God by a very ardent and delicious love. . . . We can say in some manner, however, that this soul, not having arrived as yet at the source of light, desires with ardor to feel God present, to repose in His arms, and to receive the sacred kiss which the holy spouse demands of her Beloved; whilst in the *effective* or supreme union God manifests Himself to the soul, raises her to Himself, enraptures her, gives her the kiss of peace. . . . The soul on her part tastes and enjoys Him. . . . This is the *spiritual marriage.*"

2. There are, besides, numerous degrees in the *fruitive* union properly so called, according to the diversity, the intensity, and the extent of the graces that are accorded to souls. We can only point out the principal ones. In the first degree, it is the *simple* union. In the second degree, it is the *ecstatic* union. In the third, it is the *transforming and consummated* union, which is called also the union of transformation or spiritual marriage.

The degrees of the fruitive union are sometimes expressed under another form. The passage we are about to cite will furnish an example of it and will give us at the same time on the highest degree of this union, that is to say, on the *effective* consummated union, a faithful summary of the experience of the saints and of the teaching of the best authors.

"In the first degree of the fruitive union [*simple union*]," says Father Louis Chardon, O.P., after Richard of St. Victor, "the soul is assured that nothing can alter her repose. . . . In the second [*ecstatic union*], the presence of the Beloved sheds in her rapturous pleasures. In the third [*transforming union*], she is absorbed, swallowed up, and transformed. . . . In the first degree, the soul separated from creatures, reposes in herself; in the second, the Beloved is with her; in the third, she is in the Beloved. In the first degree, she seeks her Beloved; in the second, she holds Him; in the third, she becomes one thing with Him by participation in His more than adorable and more than lovable Person.

"In the last degree there takes place a certain absorption of one spirit into the other, by a reciprocal aspiration, as if they were living sponges endowed with a powerful attractive faculty. . . . The soul becomes fervent, languishing, liquefied, and dilated; is filled with the sole Good which satisfies her perfectly in all the amorous, insatiable capacity of her essence. It is then that the powers ennobled by impressions incomparably more divine than heretofore are recalled so that the understanding may know and the will may touch the most high and sweetest Divinity without hindrance, resistance, alteration, noise, or distraction, contrary to the most peaceful and tranquil possession which forms her happiness in this world; for it seems that her whole interior has passed into a state of infusion. The understanding comprehends not what it hears. It feels itself so profoundly prepossessed with a supernatural fullness of divine light, which represents, so to speak, the immense greatness of God, that it seems to be in the midst of Him as a drop of water lost in the ocean. . . . It is so also with the will; seized with the excessive and superabundant impression of love, which corresponds with the operation of the understanding, she feels herself altogether changed in tender inclination towards God, since she has life only to breathe continually fire and flame, and to allow herself to be imbibed, penetrated, possessed, and enraptured by them. There remains to her only one sort of insensibility, that as to her own operation, which comes to her from the fullness of her occupation and of her respiration in a plenitude of divine love, where she is lost in a profound, pacific, and delicious repose. This state has such intimacy and elevation above all that we can experience in the acts we produce in an ordinary way, that we can say that what takes place there constitutes an enjoyment in the essence of the soul above the powers and above all they can do of themselves. They are, so to speak, the first fruits of eternity."

II

We must be on our guard, however, lest we be drawn into the error of imagining that the *fruitive* union has for its effect to make of God and the soul one and the same thing. The pretended absorption and transformation of the soul in God is an error of false mystics condemned by the Fourth Council of the Lateran.

In the fruitive union here below any more than in the fruitive union of Heaven, the substance of God and the substance of the soul are not commingled. There is, it is true, in this union, as Massoulié notes, an intimate presence of substance with substance, but there is no change in the essence of God or in the essence of the soul. God and the soul are united, as he who knows perfectly is united to the object which he knows, and as he who loves perfectly is united to the object which he loves. This union is accidental and not substantial. Love tends to unity, it is true, but with the sole unity possible, which is the unity of mind, will, and operation.

Let us enter more fully into this matter, which is not wanting in a certain importance. The author whom we shall cite, when replying to the question that occupies us here, will furnish some explanations which will make us comprehend still better in what consists the *fruitive* union commonly called *effective.*

"This happy transformation," says Father Louis Chardon, O.P., "is not brought about through identity and common existence, but through the admirable union of liquefying love, which, by the excess of interior sweetnesses and by the vehemence of *fruitive* love, packs the affective part of the soul, and seems to absorb all the power and light of the human intellect. This effects that the mind, without labor and in peace, dies to itself and to all things, is reduced to a certain passive state by a love inflamed, ardent, acute and subtle, which grows upon it without its knowing whether it is with it or without it, and is found thus transformed by a transformation of will and of affective operation. This is so to the extent that those souls are not in themselves as to affection; they are in God. They live not and they work not of themselves, but as animated with the life of God, who, being the principle of necessary operation in Himself, is made the principle of loving operation in them. We need not believe that they do not act. It is the greatness of the divine touch that robs them of the sense of their own operations. In truth, the principle of their operation is not so much their understanding, as God in their understanding; and the principle of their love is not so much their will, as God in their will, who brings about in it, through experimental love, some resemblance of what beatific love and the Light of Glory bring about in the blessed. . . . Just as we can say of the blessed that they are made gods by resemblance; so, also of those souls who see themselves swallowed up in the immense capacity of divine love. In them no vestige of creatures; no trace of themselves; no supernatural graces and lights; no remembrance of what they are, of what they were, or of what they have done; they know nothing except that they do not know. They know only God; they feel, they taste, they touch, they experience only His delicious love; or, if I dare say so, only the adorable Divinity, into the spirit of whom this supereminent love has caused them to enter, to be as far as it is possible to their condition divinely changed, transfigured, and transformed."

FIFTH CONFERENCE

Questions Answered

1. That the exposition of the union of the soul with God may be as complete and satisfactory as possible, two or three difficulties remain yet to be cleared up:

First, does the perfection of the soul consist in the *fruitive* union?

I answer, no; the perfection of the soul consists essentially in sanctifying grace and in charity; that is to say, in the union of love. "He that remaineth in charity remaineth in God and God in him." (1 John iv, 16.)

It is not the greatest lights of contemplation that constitute our union with God on earth; for this knowledge, however supernatural it may be, is produced by images and ideas infinitely removed from what God is in Himself. Neither does union with God consist in the lively and sensible feeling of His presence which contemplation procures for us; these are, without doubt, fruits of charity, but they are indications of the existence of the divine union, rather than constituting it. The union of the soul with God has its true and solid foundation in the love of charity. It is not that the *fruitive* union is not one of the most precious graces that God can accord to souls; this union has its principle in a greater participation in the gifts of the Holy Ghost. It supposes the most sublime virtues, efforts more generous, degrees of charity more elevated. It imparts joys more sweet, more intimate. For all these reasons the *fruitive* union generally indicates a union of love most perfect and intimate; but it remains of the same nature; it is always a participation in the divine life.

It is, then, undeniable, no matter what certain false mystics may say of it, that perfection does not consist essentially in the *fruitive* union, but rather in the ordinary union of charity. The best that the *fruitive* union has, comes from the union of charity. God often denies the *fruitive* union to the most perfect, to accord it to those who are beginners. It is a true grace, but a great number of souls are sanctified without obtaining it.

2. Another question that might be asked is:

Has the union of the soul with God by charity any resemblance to the fruitive union of Heaven?

The union of charity and the fruitive union of Heaven are of the same nature. They are two operations of the same life—only here below we do not enjoy it in its plenitude. On earth the union of charity is the beginning of life and happiness; in Heaven, it is the consummation and the final crown of our love for God. The soul will then receive "the fullness of God" (Eph. iii, 19), fullness of truth in her intelligence, fullness of love in her will, fullness of joy in her heart. We have already in this world something of this fullness of truth, love, and joy, when the union of charity becomes a fruitive union. The mind, all filled and all occupied with God, is raised and conducted by the Holy Ghost to sublime and almost angelic heights. The will, more happy still, is drawn, ravished, transformed into the one object of its love. Joy the most pure, inseparable companion of love, fills the heart and causes it to say: "It is enough, Lord, it is enough!" In spite of all the miseries and infirmities of our exile, we then can live the life of God. Charity, which effects the intimate union of God with our soul and of our soul with God, is the same in Heaven and on earth. All the graces of choice, all the privileges of a soul that contemplates and loves her God in the fruitive union, increase and perfect this union, even to render us participants of the delights of Heaven.

3. A third question might be asked: Does the union of a soul on earth sometimes surpass that of the saints in Heaven?

It *can* happen that the charity of saints on earth surpasses that of the saints in Heaven, and then their union with God is greater, although less perfect. "There is," says St. Francis de Sales, "more of contentment, of sweetness and perfection in the exercise of holy love among the inhabitants of Heaven, than in the pilgrims of this miserable earth; but there have been souls so happy in their pilgrimage that their charity here has been greater than that of many saints already rejoicing in the eternal country. Surely, there is no sign that the charity of the great St. John, of the Apostles and apostolic men, was not much greater even whilst they lived here below, than that of little children who, dying in baptismal grace, enjoy immortal glory.

It is not the ordinary thing that mortal men have more charity than the immortals; yet there have been mortals who, being inferior to the immortals in the exercise of love, have surpassed them in charity and in the habit of love. . . . The infant in Heaven has more clearness and light in the understanding, more ardor in the exercise of love in the will; but St. John or St. Paul have had on earth more of the fire of charity and more of the heat of dilection. But—and it is a consoling thought that we ought not to omit—the charity of the saints in Heaven is in its final term and can no longer be augmented, whilst our union with God by charity can always grow and be perfected."

4. A last point of information: By what signs can we recognize the union of the soul with God?

As long as we live on earth, we cannot know with absolute certainty without a particular revelation of God, "whether we are worthy of love or hatred," and this is accorded only as a special privilege, and very rarely. Meanwhile we can have conjectures sufficiently well founded to hold ourselves under the eye of God, and to accomplish His holy will with much confidence and love. Here are the principal signs of the supernatural life in us:

(a) The first is *sense*. One can have life without sense, even as have plants and trees; but one cannot have sense without life. A soul who knows by experience that she is sensible of the things of God, carries in her the assurance that she lives the life of God; for she fears more to displease Him by a single sin, even venial, than to lose her own life. The purely natural life cannot impart this sentiment.

(b) The second sign is *respiration*. If you wilfully love to breathe the atmosphere of the world, its vanities and pleasures, if all that pertains to the service of God and the exercises of piety repulses and alienates you, it is to be believed that you have not the supernatural life in you. If, on the contrary, you willingly breathe the perfumes of virtue, if the spirit of Jesus Christ and His Gospel dilates your heart, your soul lives truly the life of God; for it is impossible that any other life than His could make you breathe with pleasure an atmosphere so raised above the sentiments of nature.

(c) The third sign is *hunger*. If you feel no hunger for celestial aliments; if prayer, meditation, the knowledge and love of God, the frequentation of the Sacraments excite in you no supernatural appetite, it is to be believed that you have not the life of God in you. If, on the contrary, you are insatiable as to the goods of grace, if you bring to a feast divine grace, a respectful and ardent preparation accompanied with holy desires, you can be assured that the supernatural life is in you.

(d) The fourth and principal sign is *action.* Life manifests itself by action. If your soul produces no works of life, it is dead; but if all your works are acts of virtue, above all, acts of humility, renunciation, love of God and neighbor, you possess the supernatural life; the life of God is in you; you are truly united to God; for "a bad tree cannot produce good fruit."

Meanwhile, whatever be the moral certitude acquired by means of the signs that we have indicated, we must always "work out our salvation with fear and trembling."

SIXTH CONFERENCE

The Effects of the Union of the Soul with God (I)

1. The study of the most perfect union of the soul with God—which union, as we have said, is the end and the term of the interior life—would be incomplete without our inquiring into the effects of the union. What are in general the effects of the union of the soul with God?

They are all the effects of sanctifying grace and charity, and they may be summed up under the seven following heads, as treated of in this and the following conferences. (1) The soul united to God is raised to the *highest honor* that one can ambition. (2) By means of the virtues that grace produces and develops she participates in the *power* of God. (3) She acquires a *merit* which gives her a right to an eternal reward. (4) God imparts to her intelligence a most vivid *light* of revealed truths, (5) and to her will a great *joy,*

(6) a holy *liberty,* and (7) a solid and true *peace.*

I have said that the soul united to God by sanctifying grace and charity is raised to the highest honor one can ambition. Now honor in its highest degree comprises three things: a very sublime state, a sovereign authority, a transcendent glory. We find these three things united in the union of our souls with God.

First of all, the divine union raises us to a most sublime state. Indeed, it is the property of grace to make us partakers of God. Grace is a quality of the divine order which insinuates itself and penetrates into the substance of the soul. In doing so, it produces effects that are proportioned to it and impart to it its own advantages. Just as whiteness applied to an object renders it white, so grace, a quality of the divine order, applied to the soul, gives her a new being, a new nature, and raises her to a divine state. As grace is a participation of the divine nature, it deifies the soul in an ineffable manner and makes her, by favor and by participation, what God is by nature. It is thus that grace, seed of the Divinity in our souls, in regenerating us spiritually and in communicating to us the divine nature of which it is a lively expression, constitutes us true children of God, which is the most sublime state we can attain to.

In the second place, the divine union imparts to us a sovereign authority. By grace, God reigns in us. By it also He renders us participators of His authority and causes us to reign over ourselves. By grace, which makes us children of God, we reign over the entire world and over all creatures; for all things serve the good of those who love God.

But, what is more admirable still is, that the adorable Divine Trinity dwell in us and come to crown and consecrate by their presence this sovereign authority. To this sovereign authority, coming from the divine union, we can attribute the promptitude with which the love of God makes us fulfill the divine commands. "Love," says St. Gregory, "is never idle. It operates great things if it exists." A love that refuses to act is not love. Promptitude in fulfilling the will of God is, then, a manifest effect of the divine union and of charity.

Lastly, the divine union causes us to ascend to the height of honor by a transcendent glory, in the presence of which all worldly glory is only a shadow. The soul united to God draws down on herself His loving regard. He takes pleasure in contemplating her and cannot refrain from loving her; for she is "all fair" in His eyes. Man, the creature of God, depends on the Divine Majesty, as every work depends on the workman or the artist who produces it. On this title man is the servant and slave of God. But love enfranchises slaves and makes them friends. This is what the Divine Master declared to His disciples: "I will not now call you servants, but I will call you my friends." (John xx, 15.)

The angels and saints in Heaven, and the just on earth, associate themselves with the sentiments of God. There are without doubt from time to time discordant voices among the wicked; but they help only to increase the glory of the friends of God by the occasion they give them to practise humble patience and greater charity. Such is the honor that the divine union procures us. It can be wrested from us only by sin.

2. The second effect of grace and union with God is a participation in His power. This power is so real and so efficacious that the least degree of grace, if we are faithful to it, suffices to triumph over all the ardors of con-

cupiscence. Charity strengthens us against adversity and against all the temptations of this life. Trial cannot hurt him who possesses charity; it turns always to his profit, for, as St. Paul says: “To him that loveth God all things coöperate unto good.” There is more, as experience proves; difficulties seem to disappear and become sweet to him who loves.

Grace, by means of the virtues of which it is the principle and the motor, imparts to all the powers of our soul a marvellous energy. It strengthens our will, so tempers the motions of our concupiscible appetite that they may not entice us to evil, so relieves and sustains our irascible appetite that it may not languish in the pursuit of good; and as all the natural passions which reside in these lower appetites of the soul are so many snares and dangers to virtue, grace places at each of these passages a guard to arrest enemies and to defend them against their entry. This guard is composed of the infused virtues, each of which corresponds to one of our passions.

The divine union, then, carries with it the power of the virtues. Grace is not content with raising us to a divine state, to the eminent dignity of children of God; it procures for us the necessary means to exercise the functions of that state. Every being should produce actions befitting its nature—God raises us by favor to a divine state; His grace renders us capable of performing the acts of it by means of infused virtues, and our natural powers, perfected by those virtues, can, with the help of actual graces, know, love, and act as befits children of God.

3. The third effect of union with God by grace is merit. This merit, founded on our quality of children of God, living members and co-heirs of Jesus Christ, and founded also on the divine promises, consists in this, that all our actions are, so to speak, so many treasures that we amass for Heaven, provided they are good, free, and directed towards God, at least virtually, by charity. Such is the miracle of mercy and love operated in the soul by sanctifying grace and charity. It is an undeniable principle that eternal beatitude is promised only to those who have charity; without it all the rest is insufficient. The difference of degrees of charity alone determines the difference of degrees of beatitude. Many have practised an abstinence more severe than that of the Apostles, but the Apostles surpass all the

blessed in beatitude, because of the excellence of their charity; for, says St. Paul, "they have received the first-fruits of the Spirit." It is, then, certain that the difference of charity measures the merit and the difference of beatitude.

4. The fourth effect is that God imparts to the intellect a most vivid light of revealed truths. The union with God by charity is the source of the greatest lights that the soul can receive in this world. The supernatural life on earth is a commencement of the glorious life of eternity. Now, in Heaven charity is the principle and measure of the light of glory, which is the greatest of all the participations of the light of God. He who will have a more perfect degree of the light of glory, will see God more perfectly; and he who will have more charity, will have a greater light of glory, because greater charity produces a greater desire, and desire renders us in a certain manner capable of possessing the object desired. This is why he who will have more charity, will see God more perfectly. It is thus on earth; the union with God by charity is a principle of light. "We are wrapped up in darkness," says holy Job. Often, in fact, we are ignorant of

what we ought to do or desire; but charity teaches us all that is necessary for salvation. "His unction teacheth you all things," says St. John, because, where charity is, there is the Holy Spirit, who knows all and "who conducts us in the right way." "You that fear the Lord, love Him," says the Book of Ecclesiasticus (xi, 10), "and your hearts shall be enlightened." You shall have the science of salvation.

In order to attain to this perfect light, it does not suffice that we possess habitual faith and infused prudence, the effect of which is to dissipate the darkness of our understanding, so that we may know what we ought to believe and practise. We need, furthermore, the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Among those gifts, four regard the intellect, namely: the gift of wisdom, which imparts to us knowledge of the most elevated truths; the gift of knowledge, which has for its object things of an inferior order; the gift of understanding, which enables us to penetrate into the sense of the divine mysteries, and reveals to us their beauty and harmony; finally, the gift of counsel, which aids us to triumph over the continual perplexities of life. All these lights are so many rays which proceed from grace, as from a divine focus, and it is for this reason that the Holy Scriptures call it "a *holy unction* which teaches us all things." (1 John ii, 20.)

If it is true that grace makes of our soul an abode of God, and that God, according to the word of St. John, is "the true light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world," it is evident that the purer and holier a soul is, the more rays of the divine light will shine with brilliancy in her, just as the rays of the sun are reflected so much the better in a mirror whose surface is clean and even. This is why St. Augustine calls God "the wisdom of the purified soul," for He teaches her all that is necessary for salvation.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Effects of the Union of the Soul with God (II)

1. We continue to-day the treatment of the same sublime subject that occupied us in our last conference, namely, the effects of the union of the soul with God.

The fifth effect of the union of the soul with God is joy. It is natural to all beings to find their satisfaction and their joy in the possession of their last end, because in it they find their perfection. God is our Sovereign Good, and we find already on earth a happy commencement of satisfaction in our union with Him by grace and charity. Indeed, we possess a foretaste of the joy of Heaven when we have found God by knowledge and love, and can say that He dwells in us. A soul that possesses God cannot desire any other thing: He alone suffices for her. The afflictions and trials of this life do not cause her to lose this happiness, for she possesses a good which no one can snatch from her, as long as she remains united to God by charity.

There is no true joy where charity is wanting, for he who desires a thing is happy and possesses joy and repose only as long as he has what he desires. But the condition of temporal goods is sad: when a man has them not, he desires them; when he has them, he despises them. It is not the same with spiritual goods. When we love God, we possess Him. "He who abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him." And God is the repose of those who love and desire Him.

The joy of the soul here below has two fecund sources—the love of benevolence, which makes us happy at seeing in God infinite perfections, and the anticipated possession of God by charity. The former of these joys is easy to those who love God; the latter is one of the fruits inseparable from a good conscience.

"O you who seek perfect repose assured to the Christian in the future life," says St. Augustine, "hold for certain that you shall find it by anticipation in the midst of the cares and tribulations of the present life, if you love and practise the commandments of Him who has given the promise of it. You shall know ere long by experience how the fruits of justice are more sweet and delightful than those of iniquity, and shall find that the testimony of a good conscience, in the midst even of afflictions, is incomparably more valuable than all the pleasures and prosperities of the world with a criminal conscience."

"From those words," adds the Venerable Louis of Granada, "we conclude that the sweetness of a good conscience resembles that of honey. For just as honey is not only sweet in itself, but even renders sweet insipid and bitter things with which it is mixed—even so, a good conscience is a source of joy so abundant that it sheds it over the pains of this life and makes of them so many veritable pleasures.

"When the just soul is assailed with trials, she seeks in vain around her for support and consolation. It suffices for her, then, to direct her regards to her interior and contemplate the serenity and peace of her conscience to feel herself immediately consoled. She understands that the essential thing for her is to possess and preserve this inestimable good. Without doubt she cannot have in this regard an absolute certitude. Nevertheless, as the sun at his rising, even before appearing on the horizon, floods the land with his soft and radiant light; even so, a good conscience, although it does not yet manifest itself in all its brilliancy, nevertheless, sheds in the soul a celestial splendor which inundates her with lights and pleasures."

We can then affirm: The soul united to God by charity knows and tastes how sweet it is to love God. For "His conversation hath no bitterness" and it dissipates all sadness.

2. Another effect of the union of the soul with God by charity is a holy liberty. The holy liberty of the children of God consists in enfranchisement from slavery to the passions, the vices, the world, the devil—in a word, to sin. This liberty, a fruit of the Redemption, subjects our inferior powers to the spirit, and our spirit to God. "Where the spirit of God is," says St. Paul, "there is liberty."

The grace of the Holy Ghost that dwells in our souls and that has been merited for us by Jesus Christ delivers us from the sad slavery in which we were, so to speak, buried by sin, and has made us enjoy a true liberty. There remain in us without doubt passions to combat, but actual grace, which finds in us sanctifying grace and charity with the train of all the infused virtues, aids us powerfully to conquer them if we are faithful.

This holy liberty is not a law of fear, but a law of love, a servitude of love. We can say that there are two servitudes, namely, the servitude of fear and the servitude of love. The former is painful without being meritorious; for he who abstains from sin only through fear of chastisement has no merit in abstaining and ceases not to be a slave. The servitude of love, on the contrary, is a true liberty. To act through the love of God, not through fear of justice, is not to act as a slave; it is to act as a free man; for it is to act of one's own free will.

See how grace, in subjecting us to God, renders us perfectly free, and in abasing us beneath Him, raises us above all things. Who can express the innocent pleasures that are born of this perfect liberty? As man is essentially free, and as liberty is one of the most beautiful appanages of his nature, there is nothing that he prizes more. What sweetness for this soul that had so long groaned under the heavy burden of the world, of sin, of the devil, of creatures—to see them at her feet! What satisfaction to see all her chains broken; to see herself mistress of herself; to command her body and her appetites; to see herself disengaged from all attachments to creatures! What contentment for this soul to be no longer mastered by her passions; to walk with a certain amplitude of heart, doing all that she pleases, and wishing to do only what pleases God; in a word, to be lifted above all things! Surely we can say that in this state, all transported with joy and unable to contain herself, the soul can only render thanks to her Liberator, chanting to Him with David: "Thou hast broken my bonds asunder: to Thee will I offer a sacrifice of praise, and I will call on the Name of the Lord!" or with St. Antoninus: *"Servire Deo, regnare est*—to serve God is to reign."

3. The last effect of the union of the soul with God by grace, is peace. This peace, which Augustine calls tranquillity of order, puts us in accord with God, with our neighbor, and with ourselves; with God, for charity is a reciprocal friendship; with the neighbor whom we love as ourselves for God's sake; with our-

selves in the triumph of grace over our rebellious nature.

This peace comes certainly from our union with God, where we find our repose in a manner more perfect than all other creatures find it in their center. This peace comes from the accomplishment of a good part of our desires; from the good order which grace puts into our interior in submitting reason to God and our inferior appetites to reason; from the perfect conformity of our will to that of God; from a great abandonment to Divine Providence; and, finally, from the testimony of our conscience and the moral assurance of our union with God by grace and charity. This peace is so perfect that Scripture calls it "a multitude of peace," "a river of peace," "the peace of God which surpasseth all understanding." When we desire temporal goods, and our desires are realized, we are not satisfied; our heart sighs after new goods. "The heart of the wicked," says Isaias, "is like the raging sea which cannot rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire." It is not thus with him who loves God. The Psalmist said: "Abundant peace to those who love your law, O Lord."

God, greater than our heart, suffices to fill our desires.

The blessed peace of which we speak is one of the twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost enumerated by the great Apostle. It proceeds from all the other excellent privileges attached to virtue; or, rather, to ascend to its primary source, it flows down from virtue itself, and is its inseparable companion.

It is as natural to virtue to enjoy this interior peace, as to have the right to exterior homage and respect. It is its reward and prerogative, and nothing can despoil it of it; it is inherent and essential to it. The interior war that is enkindled in our heart has no other cause than unquiet pride and the incessant revolt of the passions. But when these are subdued and submissive to reason, peace reigns in the soul, and with it the anticipated beatitude of the elect.

Once again, peace comes from the liberty that virtue gives us. Spiritual consolations are the third source whence comes this unalterable peace. Indeed the appetites of the inferior part of our being, when subjected by virtue, hold themselves in silence and repose happy and satisfied as they are with the part that comes to them from the pure and celestial joys which God pours out on the superior part of the soul. The man, whole and entire, reposes in peace and shares in the fruitful communications of the Sovereign Being.

Lastly, this peace is begotten of the confidence the good have in God; for it is above all this confidence which preserves the soul calm and serene in the midst of tribulations. The just have God for their shield and defender, for their Father, under whose powerful protection they live in calm and peace.

"A profound peace," our Lord said to St. Catherine of Siena, "is the portion of those who love My Name. Nothing can disturb it, because they love solely My law, that is to say, My will; and My law is that which governs all things. They are so intimately united to Me by it that nothing in the world can sadden them, except sin, because it does Me an injury. They see with a pure and tranquil regard of the soul that I, the Sovereign Master of the universe, govern all things with infinite wisdom, order, and charity. They know, by consequence, that what happens to them is good. I choose the best for them and I provide more usefully for their wants than they could themselves know, wish, or do. In all that happens to them, interiorly or exteriorly, they taste the sweetness of My ineffable charity."

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

The Effects of the Divine Union in Perfect Souls

1. Having seen what are in general the effects of the union of the soul with God, we go on to consider what are the effects of the divine union in perfect souls. As to this union, it may be said that the closer the ties that bind the soul to God, the more sublime the effects produced by it.

These effects are of the same nature as those already described. Meanwhile, the communication of grace being greater, and the gifts of God being more considerable in perfect souls, it follows that the effects have also a character of perfection all particular, and truly extraordinary.

Here is how St. John of the Cross sums up the admirable effects of the divine union in the *spiritual espousals*. It will be easy to recognize in them all the effects we have attributed (after St. Thomas) to the union of the soul with God by charity, but with the character incomparably more sublime, which distinguishes them and gives them a special place among mystic phenomena. We should not forget, moreover, that these effects are more or less intense, according to the degree of the divine fruitive union to which the soul is called. "The soul," says St. John of the Cross, "sees and possesses in this divine union an abundance of inestimable riches. (a) She finds in it the repose and pleasure that she desired. (b) She receives in it concerning the Divinity marvellous lights, which reveal to her admirable secrets, and this is one of the gifts that she relishes most highly. (c) She feels in it a formidable power and strength, in the presence of which every other strength and power disappear. (d) She tastes in it an ineffable sweetness and incomparable spiritual delights. (e) She finds in it the divine light and a perfect quietude. (f) She enjoys in a very elevated manner the wisdom of God, which shines forth in the harmony of creatures and in the divine works. (g) She feels herself filled with goods, delivered and sheltered from all evil. (h) But, above all, she perceives that she enjoys an inappreciable love which makes all her nourishment and in which she is confirmed."

We count also among the effects of the divine union certain phenomena of the mystic life—liquefaction, holy languors, the gift of tears, the wound and the intoxication of love, ecstasy, rapture, etc. These effects are produced in different degrees, according as souls are prepared for them, and as God judges proper to raise them more or less in contemplation. We shall speak of these effects later on, when we treat of the extraordinary graces of the mystic life. Let it suffice to indicate here those mystic phenomena among the effects of the divine union: for these are not spiritual communications properly so called, but solely their effects.

2. As to the honor conferred on perfect souls in the divine union, it consists in a very great intimacy and holy familiarity with God. There are delightful conversations, ineffable communications, exceptional graces; in fine, the soul arrives at the highest degree of honor that can be accorded to a creature here below, in the perfected and consummated union of

transformation, or spiritual marriage. We shall treat of this truly extraordinary grace later on.

All souls sanctified by divine grace are in some sort spouses of Jesus Christ, since they are united to Him by the bonds of charity; but this is not yet the mysterious union with which God favors perfect souls.

The perfect soul possesses the "virtues of a purified heart," that is to say, she practises the virtues in a nobler, and often in a heroic manner, which indicates a union of transformation, and, by consequence, a grace of very intense strength and a merit all exceptional.

The light the perfect soul receives in the divine union is extraordinary, and consists in a greater communication of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

We shall show how the three gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding become more particularly the formal, immediate, and intimate principles of infused contemplation. In the practical point of view we must add here the gift of counsel. "This light," says Father Surin, S.J., "renders souls wise with that true wisdom which knows how to taste God and all that has relation to Him and makes known to them many sublime truths in the order of nature that are hidden from others. It gives them for their own conduct an intelligence and a discernment which never fail them in time of need and which intimate to them what they ought to do in difficult circumstances, where ordinary prudence would be at sea. These are sometimes persons simple and rude; meanwhile, their conduct is irreprehensible. It is very rare to see them deceived and inclined to take the false for the true. Whence comes this, if not from the spirit of God, who enlightens and governs them?"

Finally, this divine light puts them in the state to counsel others, and nothing is more wise than the advice they give to those who consult them. All these advantages are the effects of the four gifts of the Holy Ghost: wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel.

The interior joy of the soul increases in proportion as she advances in the divine union. To render an account of this we must follow all the degrees of the mystic scale and explain by the testimony of doctors and saints the different effects of the fruitive union, a thing we hope to do successively for passive recollection, the prayer of quietude, the simple union, and the transforming and consummated union. The more the soul separates herself from creatures, the more she approaches to God by knowledge and love; the more also is her joy pure and perfect.

3. The holy liberty of the divine union in perfect souls is beautifully explained by Tauler in two remarkable passages.

"Interior liberty," he says, "consists in this, that the soul, rejecting all profane and worldly ideas, raises herself to God promptly, freely, with ease, and without images, in all her spiritual exercises; as in thanksgivings, divine praises, testimonies of respect, fervent prayers, and the motions of inflamed charity. He who thus approaches God by spiritual ejaculations, with a liberty and an interior disengagement from external things, and who takes God alone for his end, cannot fail to feel the effects of the divine bounty and to prove in himself an intimate union with God, true perfection of the interior life. In fact, this union gives birth to new desires, warms the man from within, and gives him new strength to love and act; and the soul in acting acquires a stronger union with God—in such sort that the mind, and the action of the mind, and the union with God, and the progress of love are perfected and renewed more promptly."

Elsewhere, the "Illuminated Doctor," as he is called, adds: "God, by the infinite liberty which is His essence, detaches the soul from all propriety; for she cannot be in repose until she breaks through and soars above all that is outside of God, and until she acquires a liberty all divine, of which nothing can interrupt the exercise, and this can be done in as much as she becomes herself, so to speak, eternal in fixing herself in this immovable eternity, which is God Himself. We must remark that I call free him who is not bound or attached to anything and with whom nothing outside of God has connection. The soul, then, in this sense is perfectly free when she puts herself above all that is not God, and when she has affection neither for herself nor for any creature, but refers them all to God, who alone merits our love."

4. Lastly, the soul arrived at the highest degree of union tastes a superabundant peace, a constant and unalterable calm; for her charity is perfect and often heroic.

In the *Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena* we find the explanation of four sorts of tears. The last are unitive tears, fruit of the peace of which we speak: "In the *fourth state,*" it is said there, "the soul has made so much progress that she not only suffers with patience, but desires even to suffer more. She despises all enjoyment, from whatever source it comes, provided that she can resemble Jesus Christ crucified. She receives a fruit of spiritual peace, a union by sentiment with My divine nature, of which she enjoys the milk as the infant that rests peacefully on its mother's breast. Its lips there draw nourishment; even so the soul, arrived at this last state, rests on the bosom of My divine charity. She places the lips of holy desire on the flesh of Jesus crucified; that is to say, she follows His example and His doctrine; for she well understood in the *third state* that one could advance only by Me, the Father, because in Me can be found no pain. It is found in My beloved Son, the sweet and tender Word. Yes, you cannot advance without pain. It is through suffering much that you will arrive at solid virtues. The soul places herself, then, on the bosom of Jesus crucified. She draws from it the milk of virtues, which gives her the life of grace. She tastes there My divine nature, which renders the virtues sweet; for the virtues of themselves were not sweet, but they are become so because they have been done and united in Me, the Love Supreme. . . . See, my daughter, how sweet and glorious is this state, where the soul so attaches herself to the bosom of charity that her lips are never separated from this inexhaustible source."

NINTH CONFERENCE

Abnegation of Self and Abandonment to the Divine Will as Means of Uniting the Soul Most Intimately to God

I

1. It is not sufficient to know the nature of the union of the soul with God, or the wondrous effects of that union either in the lives of ordinary Christians or of perfect souls: we must go farther and learn what are the principal means of augmenting that union. This is the practical question that is to occupy us today.

Let us say at once that all the exercises of the interior life, which serve to acquire and preserve the divine union, are at the same time efficacious means of augmenting it.

Among those exercises there are many more particularly destined for perfect souls, whether of their nature, or by the degree of perfection those souls should bring to them. We shall reduce them to five principal heads: (a) a most complete abnegation of oneself, (b) a total abandonment to the divine will, (c) a greater and more supernatural devotion, (d) a more perfect recollection, (e) and finally, more fervent and frequent communions.

In this conference I shall speak of only two —complete abnegation of self, and total abandonment to the divine will.

Self-abnegation, that is, self-denial, or the renunciation of all things and of one's own self for the love of God, is the principal foundation of the spiritual life; whence it follows that the more complete this self-denial, the more the interior life increases, and the more strict is made the divine union.

The first disposition which the increase of charity demands is the separation of our heart from all earthly things. The heart cannot fix itself at the same time on different objects; for it is impossible to love God and the world. No man can serve two masters. This is why, the more we detach ourselves from the things of the world, the more we strengthen ourselves in the love of God.

This statement is conformable to the teaching of the saints. Thus the Venerable Louis de Blois says: "Let the soul learn to despoil herself of all things and of herself for the love of God; let her keep her heart free from a too lively affection for creatures, and let her not attach herself to anything visible, transient, and perishable. Let her not seek with inquietude the friendship, intimacy, or presence of any mortal, even the most holy. Let her not forget that what is best in her can become an obstacle to her spiritual advancement if she pursue the possession of it with immoderate ardor. A plate of gold placed before our eyes darkens our vision no less than a piece of iron. Let her extirpate self-love from her heart, even to the smallest germ. Let her on every occasion make the sacrifice of her own will and submit herself to the divine will so as to be in all things perfectly conformed to it. Let her never say with her mouth or with her heart through a motive of egotism: 'I wish for this!' or, 'I don't want that!' Let her always and everywhere have in view God, His honor, and His good pleasure, uniting self-denial and resignation in her prayers and pious desires, demanding and desiring only one thing—the accomplishment of God's will. Let her be equally detached from spiritual sweetnesses and sensible pleasures. Let her guard herself well against the abuse of divine graces by seeking herself in the delight she receives from them, for this would be a grave offence against the Heavenly Spouse; but let her receive with humility His gifts and preserve her heart as free as if she were deprived of them. Our corrupt nature refers everything to itself and would wish to seek itself even in the gifts of God. Let the interior soul abstain, then, from impatiently desiring spiritual sweetnesses and from putting her confidence in them. Let her be equally disposed to be deprived of them or to receive them: for it is in God, and not in His gifts, that we must place our repose. Penetrated with the sentiment of her unworthiness, this soul will guard herself well from attributing to herself anything of the divine favors; she will with thanksgiving refer all to God and to His glory. She will desire neither extraordinary graces nor revelations, and if she is sometimes favored with them, she will not believe herself more holy for that. Finally, she will never speak indiscreetly of graces she has received, and will await the event, to be sure of the good that may result from them." We can comprehend how a soul that thus practises abnegation and self-denial, can be intimately united to God.

2. To throw more light on this subject a pious Franciscan of the seventeenth century goes on to treat of the acts and fruits of perfect self-denial. "The end and nature of this life," he says, "is none other than a denial, a detachment from, an abstraction, and a negation that we make of all things of this world; of an anxious care of our body, our goods, our honor; of the seeking of all sensible love of the things of God; of all the proper and natural conduct of our understanding and will; of all self-interest; of all that which we can know, form, and think of God by the senses, by the imagination, and by human reason; of our whole selves; in a word, of all that which is not God; and to this end that we may raise ourselves high and expand through the operations of our superior powers, by a loving inclination towards the sovereign and incomprehensible Being: and that we come to possess and preserve an unalterable recollection in our inmost being, our mind adhering inseparably to God, in dereliction as well as in joy, and our will embracing Him always most closely with a pure love: to the end, I say, that we may arrive at an admirable simplification of

our mind and a very intimate union with God; so that of those two spirits, infinitely removed and different from each other, man and God, there may be formed the same will, the same love, the same spirit, and, consequently, a sacred and intimate bond of an indissoluble marriage. And let us assure ourselves that the more we grow, by the grace of God, in this faithful abstraction from all creatures, and the more the soul strips herself of everything belonging to self and all that is less than God, the more also will God, by His singular love, by His infinite complacency, and by His adorable condescension, lower Himself towards us; the more will He load us with His most gracious communications and His most amiable visits; the more will He raise us to the supernatural state, infused, divine, and celestial; the more will He make us taste and experience His loving presence, His intimate union, and His most holy love; in a word, the more will He give Himself to us as ours in admirable joy."

II

1. We now come to the second means of augmenting the divine union, namely, total abandonment to the divine will.

The abnegation of which we have spoken comprehends the stripping oneself of all things and of oneself. Now, this is practised especially in a generous self-denial in the trials of this life. We can, then, say that patience in adversity, or, what amounts to the same thing, total abandonment to the will of God, is one of the most efficacious means of augmenting charity in us. Indeed, it is manifest that if we accept numerous and hard crosses for the love of God, our love for Him is strengthened and puts on growth. The saints who bore for God rude combats were strengthened more and more in their love of God, like the workman who prefers among his works that in which he labors hardest. Thus, generous souls, those given over to the good pleasure of God, arise in love in the measure that the tide of tribulations mounts. At the time of the deluge "the waters increased and lifted up the ark." Thus trials and crosses, in multiplying themselves, lift up the faithful soul that allows herself to be conducted by the divine will.

Dearly beloved Sisters, this subject merits all our attention. Although we have already spoken of it, it appears to us useful to enter here into some developments. We shall show: first, that the way of total abandonment to the will of God is the most perfect of all the interior ways. It will be easy for us to conclude that it is at the same time the surest and the easiest way to unite us most intimately with God.

"There is," says Father Piny, O.P., "a way or manner of going to God which consists principally in submitting and abandoning ourselves to His will. It is not that in all sorts of ways one ought not to be in this disposition of acquiescence and abandonment, but because this disposition which is presupposed in the other interior ways is, so to speak, the end and the term of them. This is in such sort that souls that walk in this way have in view only the divine will, to allow it to act in all things, and to acquiesce in all that it does, deeming themselves too happy to be the subjects of His good pleasure.

"We must meanwhile remark that this interior way, which consists in letting God act, is not so passive in the acceptation of the divine will that it is not at the same time sufficiently active on our side for us to do, whether interiorly or exteriorly, all that concerns our duties and employments. The will of God, which is, in our regard, only the first cause, does not exclude, but, on the contrary, demands, as second cause, our coöperation and application in all that it wishes and ordains. But this coöperation and application must be without eagerness and solicitude, in order not to destroy holy indifference which wishes to allow God to act as to the result and which wishes to see success after its coöperation only in as far as it shall please the divine will.

2. "Let us now come to the perfection of this way of the divine good pleasure, or of total abandonment to God. According to St. Thomas, what we call perfect, is really so only in as far as it has arrived at its end and reunited itself to its principle. Now, this manner of going to God in letting Him act and in accepting all that He does, must be the most perfect of all interior ways, since it is that which unites us most perfectly, most intimately, and most inseparably to God, who is our principle, our center, and our last end. Indeed, if the union of the soul with God in this world takes place only by conformity or uniformity of wills, can man be united to God more perfectly than in letting Him act, accepting all that He does, and consenting lov-

ingly to all the destructions that it will please Him to make in us and of us?

"To have this disposition of total abandonment, is it not to wish all that God wishes, to wish only what He wishes, to no longer wish for anything except because He wishes it, and, by consequence, is it not to be transformed, as spiritual authors say, into the will of God? Is it not to be united to all that is the most intimate in God—to His Heart, to His good pleasure, to His impenetrable but always just decrees and judgments? What union with God more inseparable than that of a soul resolved to let God act? She can then say in all truth with the great Apostle: 'Who shall separate us?' Nothing can separate her from her God—neither life, nor death, nor poverty, nor persecution, nor any event, however grievous it may be, can in the least alter her loving union with God, since she wishes for nothing outside of His will and accepts all things in view of this holy and adorable will.

"It is true, then, that, to take the perfection of the interior life in relation to the union with God where it ought to conduct us, there is no way more perfect than that wherein one sets himself to allow God to act, for it unites us to

God more intimately, more inseparably than all the other manners of going to Him.

"Let us add also that there is no way more perfect, because there is none that falls in better with the rule of all perfection, which is the will of God. Indeed, the divine will, rule and measure of all perfection, cannot act otherwise than perfectly in all that it does, since it cannot separate itself from itself, and since it is perfect in itself. Our wills have perfection, holiness, and rectitude only in so far as they are conformed to the divine will. An angel who would wish to be a seraph in order that he might love God as the seraphim do, would not gain in perfection, for the reason that he would not love God in the manner and in the measure with which God wishes to be loved by him.

3. "What goes to prove the perfection of this way of total abandonment is that we can say: Without it, all the others, however interior and perfect they may appear, can degenerate into infidelity and imperfection, while, on the contrary, what appears imperfect in others (or at least in many others), becomes perfect and perfection in this. Is it not true that those who are called to the active

life believe themselves already advanced when they occupy themselves with a pious eagerness in the service of their neighbors? Is it not true that those whom God calls to the contemplative life imagine themselves to have attained perfection when they see themselves so applied to contemplation that they cannot think of any other thing, and that they preserve the desire and the taste of solitude? And, meanwhile, solicitude to devote oneself to the service of one's neighbor may degenerate into infidelity and would be an imperfection if one wished to so apply himself when it pleases the divine will that he apply himself to contemplation. We should also be unfaithful to grace if, when God wills us to be in the active life, we wish to keep ourselves in solitude. It would be equally an infidelity to make efforts to apply one's mind to contemplation when God wills us to be in interior sufferings, desertions, obscurities and drynesses. We see it; there is no interior way more perfect than to allow God to act, to adhere to His will, and to accept all that He wishes; since, without this all that is of perfection in other ways can become an imperfection and make us commit a thousand infidelities.

"We can say that, to allow God to act and to adhere to all that He does, is that precious stone that men sought for so long without finding it, and that has the virtue of changing everything it touches into gold. Indeed, a soul conducted by the way of penitence, who would not wish to think any longer of her past miseries, would be guilty of a great infidelity. It would be the same for her who, conducted in the way of fear, would refuse to reflect on the infinite justice of God and on the rigor of His judgments.

"Meanwhile, it is not less certain that a soul, after having groaned for some time at the feet of her God at the remembrance and under the crushing weight of her past sins, may cease to think and reflect on them in order to allow God to act, in abandoning herself to Him by a loving preference of His good pleasure. So, also, in place of thinking always of the rigor of God's judgments through a spirit of fear, one may no longer remember them and only say Amen to all the divine decrees. The disposition of those souls would not, then, be infidelity to grace, but rather a very sublime degree of perfection, since it would be the pure love of God and of His will that would stifle all fears and all remembrances of themselves.

"It is, then, true that total abandonment to the will of God is the most perfect and the most unitive of all the interior ways. Let me repeat it again: Abandonment to the will of God is the principal means of augmenting in us the divine union. The more perfect the abandonment, the more intimate will the union be."

O Jesus, may we have ever on our lips and in our hearts the prayer repeated by Thee three times in Thy agony: "Not my will, but Thine be done, O God, in time and eternity!"

TENTH CONFERENCE

Fervent Devotion and Perfect Recollection as Means of Uniting the Soul Most Intimately to God

I

In our last conference I pointed out two very efficacious means of uniting us most intimately with God and of preserving and increasing that intimacy in us. These are: complete abnegation of self and total abandonment to God's holy will.

To-day let us treat of two other excellent means. These are: the cultivation of a fervent devotion and of a perfect recollection in God.

What is devotion? It is the sentiment that urges us to serve God loyally, and to do His will as perfectly as possible, that is, with promptitude and ardor, and this very often without any sensible consolation. Conformably to this doctrine we call devotion the sentiment that always accompanies a good and fervent prayer.

All the world speaks of the importance of devotion in the exercises of piety. These are acts of the virtue of religion which terminate in God alone, and they play a great *rôle* in the spiritual life. They are: vocal prayer under all its forms, and in particular, the holy rosary, pious readings, mental prayer; examen of conscience; visits to the Blessed Sacrament; holy Mass; the regular frequentation of the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist; austerities; the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. We shall not enter into a detailed discussion of all these things; we shall only remark that, in order to draw true profit from the practice of those exercises, we must make them with fervor and devotion.

Devotion moves us to do well all that we do for God; that is to say, *promptly, carefully,* and *frequently*. The more faithful and fervent a soul is in the exercises of piety, and the more she strengthens herself in them, the more new graces she obtains. She no longer walks, but in a manner flies in the rude ways of virtue. "Racks and swords," says St. Francis de Sales, "seemed flowers and perfumes to the martyrs because they were devout. But if devotion can give sweetness to the most cruel torments and to death itself, what will it not do for acts of virtue? Sugar sweetens unripe fruit. Now, devotion is the true spiritual sugar that takes away the bitterness from mortifications and the hurt from consolations. . . . Believe me, O Philothea, it is the sweetness of sweetnesses, and the queen of virtues. Or it is the perfection of charity. If charity is milk, devotion is the cream of it; if it is a plant, devotion is the flower of it; if it is a precious stone, devotion is the brilliancy of it; if it is a precious balm, devotion is the odor of it, and the odor of sweetness that solaces men and rejoices the angels." "Meanwhile," adds the Venerable Louis of Granada, "the promptitude with which the soul embraces good, produces at times consolations, and consolations in their turn contribute to augment true devotion." There is, then, between devotion and consolations a reciprocity of service, as between a mother and an affectionate daughter. By this we can judge of the excellence of devotion; it animates all the other virtues and disposes us to undertake all sorts of good works; it is always in company with the most excellent virtues, and is united to them in some sort by the bonds of a strict relationship. It is thus that we see marching in its train mental prayer, contemplation, the practice of the love of God, spiritual actions, and the study of divine wisdom, a loving knowledge of God, which the Holy Scriptures so often praise. In theory all those virtues appear separate: in practice, they are one. Where is found perfect prayer, are also found devotion, contemplation, spiritual consolations, the actual love of God, and the other virtues.

"There is so striking an affinity among all those things that we easily take the one for the other without perceiving it. Thus, to treat of the proper means of acquiring devotion is to treat of the means which lead to perfect prayer, to contemplation, to heavenly consolations, to divine love, to supernatural wisdom, and to the beautiful union of the soul with God, the end of the spiritual life. It is to treat, in a word, of the proper means to procure for us the possession of God in this life."

We cannot sum up with greater clearness and precision the *rôle* of devotion in the interior life. It is in the last analysis the ornament and perfection of charity, and, by consequence, the most powerful bond of our union with God. We shall see lastly the most sublime manifestations of devotion, the numerous crosses that serve to prove the fidelity of souls called to the favors of the celestial Spouse, and the mystic phenomena which God in His munificence employs to unite them more to the Sovereign Good.

II

The practice of *recollection* appeared so important to the saints that they made it the end of all their exercises, persuaded that, by this means, they could arrive promptly at the final goal of the interior life, namely, union with God. It is to this recollection that the prophet Isaias exhorts us when he says: "Enter ye into the rock, and hide ye in the pit from the face of the fear of the Lord!"—that is to say, unite yourselves to God by Jesus Christ and His sacred wounds.

Tauler, speaking of the continual advancement of the soul in the divine union, expresses himself thus: "If anyone ask me, what is the shortest and most assured means to put us in this disposition, I will reply to him that it is to remain carefully recollected and to accustom oneself to make continual reflections on his interior, because it is there properly that one feels the true light shine; it is there that one hears the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, and that one receives the motions He impresses on us, and that we ought to follow with much promptitude; for He unceasingly solicits, presses, and draws those that belong to Him."

"Let the soul apply herself without relaxation to recollection," says the Venerable Louis de Blois; "let her put away with care vain imaginations and substitute for them holy thoughts and pious meditations; without this she will not succeed in uniting herself perfectly to God. Sometimes, it is true, God permits perfect souls to be beset with futile and bad thoughts. But it is to give them an occasion of triumph and merit. In the midst of the multiplicity of affairs, the soul will apply herself to the task of remaining interiorly free and recollected. She will bring back all her thoughts to one alone—God, sovereignly great and sovereignly good, and will carry everywhere the remembrance of His amiable presence, after the example of the Royal Prophet, who said: 'I have the Lord always before my eyes.' She will not cease to cast her interior regards upon God, not by a violent or impetuous effort, but tranquilly and peacefully, by a motion of love, calm and peaceful. Let the soul retire within herself, and there establish her sojourn, for it is within herself that she can truly enjoy her God, present everywhere without doubt, but particularly in the depth of the human soul, where He has impressed His image. Blessed he to whom God is united, not only by His essence, as in all creatures, but still more by His grace. The interior soul believes without hesitation that this invisible God surrounds and penetrates her. As the chaste spouse under the eyes of her Beloved, filled with a holy fear of respect and humility, she will say with the Prophet Elias: 'As the Lord liveth, in whose sight I stand.' When she wants to defend herself from the distractions that beset her, let her often say from her heart: 'The Lord is present,' 'The Lord sees me.' All her thoughts ought to be fixed on God to the exclusion of all other preoccupations so that she finds herself alone with God in the contemplation of the Divine Essence; so that she hides herself and dwells in God as in a profound retreat, and in a heaven where she will enjoy the happiness of possessing in herself the greatest of treasures, for it is to possess God to preserve Him in her remembrance and to be united to Him in the intimate depth of her soul.

"When the soul shall have succeeded, through recollection, in ridding herself of excessive solicitude and vain thoughts, of all vain and vulgar impressions, of the perplexities and cares which trouble and agitate her—then she can receive her celestial Spouse in a splendid home worthy of Him, and, all despoiled of herself and most agreeable to God, she will enjoy a most intimate divine union with Him. Let this soul not be discouraged because of difficulties and obstacles. . . . He who wishes to arrive at the ultimate term of perfection must labor for it with a persevering zeal."

This brings us to the question as to what we must do to obtain interior recollection. I answer, we must devote ourselves assiduously to the practice of mental prayer. Mental prayer and recollection are two inseparable things. Recollection prepares for prayer, and mental prayer in its turn strengthens and increases recollection. The more assiduous and perfect in the soul the practice of mental prayer, the more profound and continued is recollection.

Another, very simple and easy means of practising interior recollection is the practice of pious ejaculations. There are ejaculatory prayers proper to the life of union with God; there are others for those who enter, or who make progress in, the spiritual life. "To form oneself in the practice of interior recollection, it is good," says the Venerable Louis de Blois, "to retain certain formulas of aspirations, full of sweetness and fire, which will be as so many arrows launched towards God, and which will aid powerfully in the action and in the repose of contemplation, to recall His presence to oneself and to unite oneself to Him." "This exercise," says the Venerable Louis of Granada, "is very favorable to devotion and recollection. To practise it, and to guard one's heart attentively, is to close the entrance to all else but God. It moreover serves much to preserve fervor of soul." For the rest, it matters little whether these aspirations be made with the lips or solely with the heart, provided they be made with a calm and peaceful spirit, avoiding an immoderate ardor apt to degenerate into fatigue and miss the end, which is to nourish and augment as much as possible the fire of holy love in souls.

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

Fervent Communion a Means of Uniting the Soul Most Intimately to God

1. We will treat to-day of a last means of uniting the soul most intimately to God, viz.: the frequent and fervent reception of Holy Communion.

The Eucharist is the most excellent of all the Sacraments—the Sacrament of love and of the most intimate union with God. Unlike the other Sacraments, it contains Jesus Christ Himself personally. The other Sacraments contain only His gifts or His supernatural virtue. They seem to refer to this one as to their end, and it is in the participation of the Holy Eucharist that they always end.

"It is the Sacrament of Sacraments," says Denis the Mystic. "What is attributed to any of the others is contained by excellence in this. All have equally for their end to reduce to simplicity of divine perfection the multiplicity of our divided affections, and to put us in intimate communion with God. Now, all the other Sacraments receive their completion and perfection of rich treasures and of adorable sanctity from this; for, as custom has it, scarcely any of those august ceremonies is celebrated without the Holy Eucharist finishing the work commenced."

Communion is, then, the most perfect act of the interior life, its consummation on earth. There is no more efficacious means of uniting us to God. How could it be otherwise, since it is the Sacrament of love, and since it increases love in our souls? The love of God cannot remain idle. "The charity of Jesus Christ presseth us." Our souls, strengthened, consoled, intoxicated by the Eucharist, enter into a mystery of divine transformation.

"See, my daughter," said God to St. Catherine of Siena, "what excellence the soul acquires that receives, as she ought to receive, this Bread of life, this Food of angels. In receiving this Sacrament she is in Me and I am in her. As the fish is in the sea, and the sea in the fish, so I am in the soul, and the soul is in Me, the ocean of peace. And in this soul resides grace; she has received the Bread of life in the state of grace, and grace remains when the accident of the Bread is consumed. I leave in her the impression of grace, as does the seal that is pressed on the warm wax. When you take away the seal, the impression remains; even so, the virtue of this Sacrament remains in the soul. It preserves the heat of divine charity, the clemency of the Holy Ghost. It keeps the light of wisdom of My Son. The eye of the intellect is enlightened by the wisdom of the Word, so that it may know and contemplate the doctrine of My Truth. And this wisdom, which remains with power, makes it participate in My almighty power."

"Christ," says Father Louis Chardon, "has constituted in this august Sacrament the principal exercise of love, whether on the side of God, or on the side of man. If God loves, it is because He wishes to be sovereignly loved. If He imparts His love, it is to form in His creature the merit of love which ought to be his reward; so true it is that love is for itself its whole motive, its whole cause, its whole merit, and its whole price. Jesus gives Himself in the Eucharist, but He wishes to be desired. He invites, but He wishes to be sought. He wishes that he who has found Him should guard Him and hold Him tightly, whilst on His side He opens His bosom to those who will destroy themselves by it. 'He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, abideth in Me, and I in him.' He speaks of an abode more than corporal, which is made by love. 'He who abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.' It is, then, by a holy love that God insinuates Himself into our souls and makes His residence there. It is by a reciprocal love that we take possession of Him. It is by the joining together of those two loves that is accomplished the happy union that Jesus wishes to establish in this adorable Sacrament.

2. "Jesus invites: the soul disposes herself. Jesus comes: the Holy Ghost goes before Him. But before uniting, my God, what desires! what ardors! The holy soul advances; she forbears; she dares; she fears; she arises; she humbles herself. The impression that Jesus makes of the excessive greatness of His love, finally gives her confidence, and she allows herself respectfully to go where she desires, not only called, but, above all, drawn. Meanwhile, the Holy Ghost, who occupies the whole extent of her will, kindles there the coals and the fires of divine charity, without which the

holy soul would not know how to go farther. Jesus, on His side, with all the inflamed splendors of His love, approaches to unbosom Himself and to pour Himself out in a heart so well prepared.

"Behold not so much two hearts as two divine persons who now enter in combat. The heart of man is the battlefield. Where will be the greater desire: on the side of Him who gives, or of him who receives? Where will be the greater love: on the side of Jesus, or on the side of the holy soul? Who will exercise the greater efforts of the will? Who will exercise the greater empire over the soul? Either he who, by created love, disposes himself to the union, or He who with His uncreated love wishes to perfect and accomplish it? Where shall one find a heart strong enough to bear with an operation so powerful?

"O happy soul, purified from the least stain! What ardors, what fervors, what fires, what flames will not the Holy Ghost produce in a heart where He will find all the detachment, all the self-abnegation, all the purity and all the sanctity that He demands! If this Spirit of love were capable of shedding tears, He would weep bitterly at seeing that we know not how to welcome into our hearts so good and beneficent a guest. But if, on the contrary, we correspond to this signal grace, the Holy Ghost will not fail to join His flames to those of Jesus Christ. My God, what will become of the heart in the midst of those two furnaces of love!

3. "By Communion those two loves will become united, enclasped, liquefied, and lost in one another. It is enough. O immense conflagration of the living God, it is enough to have made war. End the combat by a victory which will make You triumph over all that I am! I can no longer resist the infinite and almighty ardors of Your flames! Captivate my heart; soften it; melt it; liquefy it, so as to make it pass happily into the burning furnace of Your divine and eternal charity! I thought to change You into myself; change me into You! Accomplish promptly this transformation! If You have the power to annihilate Yourself in this mystery, why will not the fire of Your love devour me?

"The soul in this state feels herself so enkindled with the flames of divine love that she can only incessantly sigh after it. She lives no longer for herself. She is no longer in herself. She is all where she loves. She can live only for the love and in the love of Him who, being all love for Himself, is made all love for her.

"Lost in this love, the soul no longer sees any perfection except what abides in Love. She loses the sentiment of every other love. She feels without feeling. She hears without understanding. Her whole contentment consists in being stripped of every contentment, and she remains plunged in the immense sea of the love of Jesus. All this takes place in the soul with a joy so excessive that she seems to have arrived at the term of her desires and at the infinite and eternal source of pure love."

From what precedes it is easy to conclude that of all the means of uniting us to God, a fervent Communion conducts us most efficaciously and promptly to the end. But the Communion must be truly fervent; that is to say, accompanied with the gift, generous and complete, of ourselves. It is in this that consists that essential fervor without which our most beautiful sentiments too often eventuate in the seeking of ourselves. If we are deprived of sacramental Communion let us not fail in communicating in spirit, with a pure conscience, by pious desires, and with a loving and filial acquiescence in His divine will—a thing that can be done many times a day. Jesus will not fail to reward our holy dispositions by a more and more intimate union with His adorable Heart.

4. And now as to the fruits of Holy Communion. They are all so many signs of the divine union effected between the soul and God. The effects of this union I already gave in a former conference. A last effect only will I recall: that is, it makes the soul participate in all the divine perfections, and fills her so abundantly with all those riches which are God Himself, that she is no longer touched with the desire of any other thing, possessing in this blessed union all that she loves—that is to say, God, and all things in Him. This union of the soul with God is, so to speak, the happy commencement of the beatitude she will enjoy forever, when, being above temporal things, she will eternally possess God in glory.

Finally, the soul thus united to her God in this transient life receives a foretaste of the grace which is a commencement of that divine bond which will unite her happily with the Saviour in eternity. All men together could not explain fully by their words and writings the utility, the ineffable advantages and delights which the holy soul finds in receiving Jesus Christ worthily.

Let us ardently pray the divine mercy, before and after Communion, to give us the grace of receiving all its fruits.

SECOND BOOK

PASSIVE PURIFICATIONS AND SPIRITUAL TRIALS

FIRST CONFERENCE

Passive Purifications in General

1. To-day we enter on the study of a high and mysterious chapter of the Interior Life, one that, by reason of its importance to souls seeking perfection, deserves all our care and attention—that styled by spiritual writers the "dark night of the soul." It treats of passive purifications and spiritual trials.

It will first of all be asked: What do we understand by passive purifications?

When we speak of passive purifications we mean an assemblage of interior and exterior pains and tribulations of a particularly dolorous nature, sent by God to complete the purification of the soul, and to prepare it immediately for the signal graces of the supernatural order.

The trials of this earthly life are in general remedies rather than punishments. They have for their end, not only to cure us of past sins, but also to strengthen us against sins to come, and to carry us to good. This is especially true of passive purifications. We can say that they have a double end: to complete a cure, and to carry us to good.

St. Teresa is particularly preoccupied with the thought of the spiritual good passive purifications prepare us for. "These sufferings," she says, "are very great, I know, and one needs, in my opinion, more courage to bear them than to bear well the labors of the world. But, as I have seen clearly, God recompenses them even in this life with a magnificent reward. . . . His design is, I think, to try His lovers. Before entrusting them with such great treasures, He wishes to know if they can 'drink of the chalice' and aid Him in carrying His cross. It is for our good, I am convinced, that He acts in this way. He thus shows us how, of ourselves, we are nothing. Reserving for us the choicest graces, He is pleased to show us beforehand by experience all our misery, for fear that it might happen to us as it did to Lucifer, to fall from a height so sublime. O my tender Master, is there a single one of Your acts where You have not in view the greatest good of a soul already wholly Yours by love, of a soul who abandons herself to You to follow Your footsteps even to Calvary, firmly resolved to aid You in carrying the cross without ever leaving You alone under its burden?"

2. Here we are to remember that the common trials of the Christian life suffice for the end that God proposes to Himself in the ordinary order of His Providence, which is to purify and sanctify souls and to conduct them to the divine union by the practice of virtues of the second degree.

But when there is question of conducting a soul to a divine union of a more sublime order, true vestibule of Heaven, God generally employs very special trials, medicinal pains calculated to work as complete a purification as possible, and to give aptitudes more supernatural, and greater energies for good. The mercy of God shines no less than His justice in the choice He makes of those painful and purifying means. In fact, just souls find in passive purifications a powerful means of removing obstacles that oppose themselves to their more intimate union with God, and a very favorable occasion of purging themselves of light faults, of detaching themselves from earthly things, and of lifting them more freely toward celestial goods.

Souls whom God calls to a more intimate union with Him must, then, expect to enter on the way of passive purifications. On the other hand, if God permits that you pass your life without many tribulations, in the conviction of Tauler, "it is a sign that you are not yet of the number of those queens whom He loves. For every soul that wishes to be the cherished queen and beloved of this Eternal Spouse cannot promise herself to arrive at this glory without passing through the fires of persecution and suffering, ay, which penetrate even to the marrow of the bone. These trials prepare the soul, as the artist prepares the wax before the fire, in order to render her capable of receiving the form He wishes to give her.

"For in order that the Supreme Workman may impress on her the august traits of His divine and eternal Essence, He must absolutely destroy her old form. This He must do so that, by the knowledge she shall have of this sublime change, she may despoil herself entirely of the old man, since it is impossible that a thing take a new and perfect form before having quitted the imperfect form that it had before."

You will ask: Is it necessary to undergo successively all passive purifications before arriving at infused contemplation?

God can certainly, if such is His good pleasure, raise a soul directly and suddenly from the abyss of sin to the highest degree of contemplation and divine union, as He did in favor of St. Paul and the Magdalen. He can, for a much greater reason, choose in the long series of passive trials those that appear to Him the most proper for the end that He proposes to Himself. It is not then absolutely necessary that a soul pass successively through all the passive purifications before arriving at infused contemplation. God is and remains always the Master of His gifts.

3. Now, there are two sorts of passive purification—that of the senses, and that of the spirit. We shall explain in conferences to come these two distinct categories of supernatural

trials. Let it suffice to say here upon what foundation this division is based.

Man is composed of two distinct parts—the inferior or sensitive part, and the superior or spiritual part. Both have shared in the disorder caused by original sin; both are called to enter on a supernatural way. Both the one and the other, therefore, have need of a particular purification. St. John of the Cross speaks at length of this purification of the sense and of the spirit, which he calls, *"the obscure night of the soul."* "This night," he says, "has two ways of producing darkness in interior souls by reason of the two parts which make up the man; the one, the sensitive part, the other, the spiritual. The first night, or sensitive purification, pertains to the senses, which it subjects to the spirit; the second night, or spiritual purification, prepares and disposes the soul for a union with God."

These passive purifications cause great sufferings. We can say, in fact, that there are no sufferings like them in the present life. The venerable Tauler tells us that, when God wishes to renew a soul completely, He employs the most bitter and penetrating afflictions in order to purify her and make her pass into a blessed and divine transformation. "The heavenly Father," he says, "is not accustomed to wash slightly the soul that He wishes to enrich with His most precious gifts, and in which He has resolved to produce so sublime a change. He bathes her, He plunges and immerses her into an ocean of bitterness, as He long ago caused Jonas, His prophet, to be immersed in the sea. . . . No, the trials of the elect are not ordinary trials. Often the sufferings that God sends them when they think least of them are so unheard of and so far above common sufferings that they never imagined the like."

According to the testimony of St. Teresa, the tribulations through which God causes contemplatives to pass are unbearable. They are of such a nature that if God did not strengthen their soul with the aliment of interior consolations, they would not have the strength to bear them. "And it is clear that it ought to be so," she adds. "For if it is true that God causes those whom He loves to tread the way of the cross, and that the more He loves them, the heavier the crosses He makes them bear, how could He spare contemplatives, whom He regards as His particular friends and whom He lauds with His own mouth? I hold it, then, for certain that God sends to contemplatives much greater crosses than to others. The way by which He leads them is so rough and thorny that they often believe themselves lost."

4. We must not think, however, that passive purifications are continual, or that they are always equally intense. God measures and proportions the rigor and duration of passive purifications to the weakness of our nature and to the end which He wishes us to attain. His infinite wisdom disposes all things sweetly and graciously, giving to each being what befits it, according to its nature. For, as Denis the Mystic says, "Divine Providence does not aim at destroying nature, but at saving it."

Passive purifications are, then, more or less long, more or less intense, according as God judges them useful for our spiritual advancement. And, according to St. John of the Cross, "the fire of these pains is felt only from time to time, and not continually. . . . God purifies the soul more or less rigorously in view of the sublimity of the union He destines for her. The trial is sometimes harder, sometimes longer." We are to know, moreover, that God does not leave without consolation those who enter generously on the way of passive purifications. St. Teresa tells us they need that our Lord give them not merely water which refreshes, but also wine which intoxicates, so that, under the influence of a holy inebriety, they may in some sort no longer feel their sufferings and receive strength to bear them. However, strong souls, called to a high contemplation, are treated with less delicacy and mildness than weak ones. They are "purified in a more intense and rapid manner; while the weak are subjected only to light trials mingled with sensible sweetnesses, so that they may not lose courage and fall back, a thing that retards them much in the way of perfection. . . . God, in order to preserve them in humility and in the knowledge of themselves, sends them on certain days drynesses and temptations, and now and again He joins to them consolations, for fear that, laden with the burden of their pains, they might seek again the pleasures of the world. . . ."

SECOND CONFERENCE

The Interior Dispositions Required in Order to Profit by Passive Purifications

1. We now go on to inquire what must be the interior dispositions of the soul that desires to profit by passive purifications.

The interior soul that wishes to profit by passive purifications must apply herself to the four following points: (a) she must continue to serve God with great fidelity and an unshakable perseverance; (b) see the will of God in all things with a great spirit of faith; (c) pray with great fervor; (d) encourage herself with the prospect of the immense graces and the infinitely precious reward that are attached to those trials.

(a) She ought to serve God with a great fidelity and an unshakable perseverance. In the midst of passive purifications we ought never to forget that word of the Divine Master: "He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved." It is not, then, necessary to increase and multiply penances indiscreetly for fear of giving way under the weight of so many evils. But it is very important to remain faithful and to persevere as much as possible in the ordinary exercises of piety and in one's habitual mortifications, in order to show God that we serve Him with a true disinterestedness and solely to please Him.

(b) She ought to see the will of God in passive purifications. She must be animated with a deep spirit of faith. "He who has entirely quitted himself and has abandoned all things," says Tauler, "receives all that happens to him as coming from the hand of the Lord. He tries to give Him thanks and to glorify Him for them. He no longer puts any difference between contempt and honor, between sweetness and bitterness, all those things being sanctified, and, so to speak, deified in the bosom of God. But I say more, he much prefers bitterness to sweetness, because, having greater merit, he knows that it is more advantageous to him. Nevertheless, because he is entirely submissive to the orders of God, he receives with pleasure all that it pleases His infinite wisdom to send him, and he tries to cherish all that comes from God. He cherishes nothing and loves nothing but God, and finds satisfaction in Him alone, so much is he filled with Him, as well in his disgusts and displeasures as in his joy and consolation."

Nor are we to think that these dispositions of abandonment to the divine will are impossible to realize. There are different degrees of conformity to the divine will. In itself the perfect abandonment of which we speak here ought to be the case with all generous souls. But, as a matter of fact, this absolute abandonment demands such fidelity that it is very rare. The most perfect souls alone enter on the way of passive purifications. In the time of those cruel trials God withdraws consolation from them; but He does not withdraw His grace; on the contrary, the more they have to suffer, the more does He come to their aid.

If you feel that you are weak and cannot do it, such is the thought of St. Catherine of Siena, look upon the saints who have followed the Son of God. They were subject to the same weakness; they were conceived, raised and nourished in the same way as we; nevertheless, with the help of God, they all followed generously this way, and the help they had, we too can have, if we wish; but because we believe we have not the power, we do it not—and this, *because we do not wish it.* For if we wished it, we would rise up against ourselves with a holy hatred; we would destroy our own will and embrace the cross with an ardent and holy desire.

(c) The soul ought to pray with great fervor. The fervor of prayer consists without doubt in an attention full of love for God. But we must add to it a great spirit of renunciation, of profound humility and perfect submission to the will of God. Of all the prayers that Jesus made during His mortal life, the principal and most excellent one is that which He addressed to His Father in these terms: "Father, let Thy will, not mine be done!" This prayer is the most glorious and the most agreeable to the Eternal Father, the most useful to men, and the most terrible to the devils. It is through this resignation of the human will of our Lord that we are all saved if we will to be; and it is for this reason that the greatest and the most perfect joy of those who are truly humble consists in doing the will of God perfectly. If we ask some relief in our trials, we must, therefore, do it with great sentiments of humility, of diffidence in ourselves, and of submission to the divine will. The saints counsel the practice of ejaculatory prayers such as the following: "Incline unto my aid, O God!" "O Lord, make haste to help me!" "O Lord, dispose of me according to Your good pleasure, but give me the grace to accomplish in all things Your holy will!"

(d) We must encourage ourselves by the prospect of the immense graces and the infinitely precious rewards that are attached to those trials. How great are those graces and how infinitely precious those rewards!

It would be necessary in order to render an account of them to oneself to reproduce here all the effects of infused contemplation—the immediate end of passive purification. Let it suffice to say that the soul that has valiantly borne those trials, obtains a greater participation in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. "In all things," says St. Paul, "we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed; we are straightened, but are not destitute: we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken: we are cast down, but we perish not; always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies." (2 Cor. iv, 8–10.)

St. Thomas Aquinas shows us in this text of the Apostle a sort of triumphant march in the midst of the greatest trials, even to the complete manifestation of the life of Jesus in us. We are pressed by all sorts of afflictions, but we are not overwhelmed by them. St. Paul shows at first the triumph of patience in general; then he descends to each particular point. "We find ourselves in insurmountable difficulties, but we do not succumb to them." We carry this treasure of patience in fragile vessels, because "we are pressed by all sorts of afflictions." No sort of trial is spared us, and we have to pass through numerous tribulations before arriving in Heaven. There is nothing astonishing in this. Our Chief and Model has gone on this route before us. "It was necessary that Christ should suffer and thus enter into His glory."

"Meanwhile, in spite of all those afflictions, we are not distressed." Those who have no other support than the world are subject to discouragements. As for us, whatever may be our trials in this world, "we are never discouraged," because our support and our hope are in God. "We meet," it is true, "with insurmountable difficulties": we are deprived of all; often we seem to be in want of necessaries, but "no one can take away from us" God, our true treasure. "We are persecuted," we are obliged to fly from one place to another; but "we are not for all that abandoned" by God: His protection follows us everywhere. We are, so to speak, crushed by temptations, which menace us unceasingly, "but we perish not," for we cease not to be assisted by God and to practise virtue with His help, "carrying always in our bodies the mortification of Jesus." Such was the condition of the Divine Master! For He suffered and died without ceasing meanwhile to live His spiritual life. After His Resurrection this spiritual life is imparted to His Body and renders it glorious and immortal. "We carry the mortification of Jesus"; that is to say, for the love of Jesus, or, rather, after the example of the death of Jesus. In fact, like Jesus, we have suffered for the truth, "in our body" as well as in our soul. "That the life of Jesus," that is to say, the life of grace which Jesus merited for us and which He gives us, and which is hidden in our hearts, "may appear also in our bodies," when He "shall come to transform the weakness of our body and to render it like to the sublime brightness of His risen body."

Such are the fruits of passive purifications: to each trial a victory, and, as a result of all those victories, a grand manifestation of the life of Jesus in us.

In the last place we must encourage ourselves by the prospect of the infinitely precious reward attached to those trials. That reward is none other than God Himself. We are the adopted children of God and co-heirs of Jesus Christ. According to St. Thomas, God will not give us for heritage only some little present—He will give us the entire heritage of His goods, and this to each of us. For the heritage of Heaven is not like the heritages of the earth, which must be divided among all the heirs. We can all see God and love Him for all eternity: nevertheless, we must remark that we can enter into the possession of His heritage only in our quality as co-heirs of Jesus Christ. Now Jesus Christ has taken possession of His heritage by great sufferings and by His death on the cross. It is thus, too, that we shall enter into the possession of our celestial heritage. Tauler in one of his sermons expounds the same doctrine in speaking of the symbolic signification of the cross of Jesus Christ. "This cross," he says, "represents perfect men, for whom the heavenly Father reserves a glory all particular with His only Son, in sending them, by an attention altogether special, a multitude of contradictions, pains, temptations, troubles, crosses, and in giving them to drink of the chalice of which Christ Himself, His only Son, has drunk. It was that which happened to the holy Apostles James and John, to whom Jesus Christ said: 'Can you drink of the chalice that I shall drink?' It is as if He had said: 'You wish to be the first among the friends of God; you must bear also more contradictions than all the others, for the disciple is not greater than the Master.' If Christ Himself had to suffer and enter by the cross into the kingdom of His Father, no friend of God can dispense himself from suffering something also."

THIRD CONFERENCE

The Passive Purification of the Senses

I

1. When treating of the interior reformation of the soul I said that one of the most important duties incumbent on him who would seek perfection is to purify the senses *actively*. The active purification of the senses, I further insisted, consists in subjecting all our experiences and all our longings of the sensitive order to the government of the mind and will. The mind and will in turn will submit themselves to God, and we shall thus reestablish, as far as it depends on us, the order and harmony which should preside over our interior renewal. The active purification of the exterior and interior senses, backed up by the active purification of the mind and will, carries the soul a long way on the road to perfection, in as much as these two operations

remove the chief obstacles to the perfect submission of the soul to God.

But in order to complete the work of sanctification in the soul, they have ordinarily to be supplemented by passive purifications. Here we must discuss the great questions pertaining to the passive purification of the senses.

The passive purification of the senses consists in an assemblage of very hard trials, and principally in a withdrawal of sensible devotion, which God causes to be felt in the inferior part of the soul with a view of purifying the sensitive appetite and subjecting it to the spirit.

We say that the passive purification of the senses consists principally in the withdrawal of sensible devotion, to indicate the principal act of this purification. In fact, to purify the senses is not only to set them free from every stain; it is further to raise them, to spiritualize them in some sort. To arrive at this result, it is useful, nay, necessary, to separate the senses from their proper object, when allowable. How will the senses subject themselves to the spirit and be elevated above themselves if they continue to take delight in sensible objects? God, then, causes those objects, even lawful ones, to disappear, as happens in the withdrawal of sensible devotion: and ere long the inferior part of the soul, deprived of its sensible attachments, submits willingly to the spirit, forms a close alliance with it, and marches in concert with it towards the same end—an intimate union with God.

Later on, God will finish His work. The passive purification of the spirit will have its reaction even in the inferior part of the soul. It is then that the senses, transformed, so to speak, by the divine union, will enter into participation with the joys of the spirit. But the way to travel will be long, and God, skillful worker of our sanctification, commences without delay His repair work by separating our soul from the sweetnesses of sensible devotion; for this devotion, very useful for our spiritual advancement in certain cases, can become an obstacle to our perfection, because of our bad dispositions.

2. The privation of sensible devotion consists, I have said, in a combination of many grievous trials: disgust of divine things, aridities, spiritual drynesses, etc.

Some explanations are here necessary. The disgust of divine things, the aridities and spiritual drynesses of which we speak here are not bad things; for those interior dispositions are not willful. Disgust alone could be bad, for it presents itself sometimes under the form of spiritual sadness, a torpor which hinders the doing of good works. But if this sadness is not consented to, if it is solely the effect of passive purification, we ought to see in it only a simple trial, since the will has nothing to do with it. Joy, sweetness, consolation, are fruits of sensible devotion which can be withdrawn without hurt to essential devotion; for essential devotion consists in an act of the will which urges us to embrace with a holy eagerness all that pertains to the service of God.

If joy, sweetness, consolation, etc., are produced in the inferior part of the soul, it enjoys sensible devotion; if, on the contrary, sadness and disgust, aridities and drynesses, there is privation of sensible devotion and passive purification of the senses. With this purification the delicious fruits of devotion remain in the superior part of the soul; their privation is felt only in the inferior part. Later on, with the passive purification of the spirit, all joy will disappear. Sadness will be felt even in the superior part of the soul. There will remain only the essential of devotion. But here in this first stage of purification all remains except the sensible.

3. It might be asked: Is the passive purification of the senses necessary in order to arrive at infused contemplation?

To this I reply that we must be purified in the inferior part of the soul in order to arrive at the full knowledge of truth. This is the doctrine of St. Paul. "Brethren," he says to the Corinthians, "I could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to persons [still] carnal, as to little ones in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you were not yet capable of digesting it. But neither indeed are you now able: for you are yet carnal" (1 Cor. iii, 1–2); which means, according to St. Thomas: "I am chosen among all the Apostles to speak a language all spiritual to perfect souls; but I have not been able suitably *to speak thus to you* and give you a spiritual, elevated, and solid doctrine. I must speak to you *as to persons still carnal.*" The Apostle calls carnal those souls to whom he must give a nourishment suitable to their weakness. He employs a comparison, *"as to little children in Jesus Christ,"* that is to say, as is becoming to souls little habituated to the perfect doctrine of faith, the nourishment of purified and advanced souls. In fact, whoever is nourished only with milk, is incapable of understanding discourses on perfect justice: for he is still a child. This milk of children is admirably described by the great teacher, Richard of St. Victor, as follows: "In the first degree of charity the Spirit, of whom it is said that His sweetness surpasses honey, comes to dwell in the soul. He inebriates her with His delights; He causes her to relish the milk and the honey, and transforms her lips into a pail which overflows; such is the first consolation offered immediately to those who renounce the world. It is a celestial nourishment given them at coming out of Egypt, to repair their strength and to sustain them in solitude, a hidden manna known only to him who tastes it. This spiritual appetite, this interior sweetness, is the milk always prepared for those whom we may call new-born children. It is the nourishment that is destined to make them arrive by degrees at the strength of mature age. At this time God leads the soul into the desert to nourish her with milk and fill her with His inebriating delights." "See, that I Myself, saith the Lord, will nourish her with milk. I will allure her and will lead her into the desert, and I will speak to her heart." (Osee ii, 14.)

The milk of sensible consolations is, then, for children, and solid nourishment is for the perfect. Now the passive purification of the senses causes us to pass from the milk of children to the nourishment of the perfect. It deprives us of sensible consolations and leads us to a higher state, where the soul is nourished with an aliment all spiritual. It is in this desert that God speaks to the soul. "But beforehand," says the same writer, Richard of St. Victor, "we must quit Egypt: beforehand we must quit the Red Sea. When the Egyptians shall have met death in the waters; when the meats of Egypt shall have lost their savor: then the soul can taste this celestial aliment. . . . If the Egyptians are not made to go under the yoke; if the perverse inclinations are not destroyed: is it not to be feared that a very unworthy guest finds a bad welcome in the city of the angels?"

As for the rest, the truth that we expound here is founded on this saying of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Amen, I say to you, it is expedient to you that I go; for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you: but if I go, I will send Him to you,"—which means, according to St. Thomas: *"Sadness fills your heart"* at the announcement of My departure; but rejoice rather, for *"it is expedient to you that I go."* It is even necessary; because, "if I do not go, the Consoler will not come to you." Could not the Divine Master confer the Holy Ghost on His disciples and remain with them meanwhile? Yes, but He did not wish it, whether because of their want of preparation, or in order to give them graces more efficacious in tribulation, or, finally, to make them appreciate more the gifts of God. For all those reasons the passive purification of the senses is not only useful and advantageous, but necessary to souls called to infused contemplation.

II

1. Here the question might be asked: Are the trials of the interior life, aridities, drynesses, or other sufferings of the inferior part of the soul, always passive purifications? To this I answer: No! Interior trials can be the result of a tepid and imperfect life, or the ef-

fect of a melancholy temperament. God sometimes also sends them to purify souls sufficiently virtuous otherwise, but who are not called in an individual and immediate fashion to high contemplation. His aim in that case is simply to accord them the precious help of sufferings in order to aid them in the work of their perfection.

Mystic authors give three distinctive signs of the passive purification of the senses, and I beg of you to note them well; for aridities and drynesses can sometimes come from other causes than the night or purification of the senses. "They can come, and often do," says St. John of the Cross, "from faults and imperfections, or from tepidity and relaxation of spirit, or even from bad dispositions of the body and its humors. This is why I point out the three principal signs which enable us to discern whether these aridities and drynesses come from the purification of the senses, or from some of those defects.

(a) "The first sign consists in no longer feeling relish or sensible consolation in the things of God, and, at the same time, in not finding it in creatures. When God introduces the soul into the *obscure night* in order to purify in her the inferior part, He deprives her of all satisfaction and permits her not to attach herself to anything. It is then an almost evident sign that the disgust and dryness do not come from faults and imperfections recently committed. In fact, if it was thus with her, the soul would feel a certain natural tendency to satisfy her tastes outside of the things of God. For if the unruly appetite abandons itself to any imperfection, immediately the soul feels herself more or less inclined towards it, according to the degree of affection or of pleasure that draws her to it. But this disgust for things natural and supernatural can have for principle a peevish disposition of temperament or a melancholy disposition which does not permit one to take delight in anything. It is, therefore, necessary to look out for the second sign.

(b) "The second sign of this purification of the senses is a habitual remembrance of God, accompanied with anxiety and a painful solicitude. The soul, deprived of her former consolations, is always under the impression that she does not serve God well and that, in place of advancing, she is falling back. We see there is a great difference between this aridity and tepidity, since the proper mark of tepidity is to have neither care nor eagerness to perfect oneself in divine things. The aridity of this purification alone ordinarily carries with it an eager care, joined to the thought and the fear of not serving God. The dryness which God employs to purify the senses is sometimes also begotten of melancholy or some other humor, but this dryness is not then less efficacious for purifying the sensitive appetite, since it strips the soul of all consolation and makes God the sole object of her solicitude. Then the inferior part, being no longer sustained by any sensible consolation, is dejected, weak, and slow to act. But the spirit ceases not to be very active and strong in its operations. When, on the contrary, the dryness proceeds from temperament, one feels only disgust and repugnance for natural things, without, for all that, feeling those ardent desires of loving God proper to the aridities of the purification of the senses.

(c) "The third sign consists in the impossibility in which the soul finds herself of making use, as formerly, of the imagination to discuss and meditate. God then commences to communicate Himself to the soul, not by the senses and reasoning, but by the way of pure spirit and without discussion, by the simple act of contemplation, to which the exterior or interior senses cannot attain. We must remark that this captivity of the powers of the soul, and the little satisfaction they have in this state, are by no means the effect of an unruly humor. If it were so, this disposition, which is naturally changeable, coming to an end, the soul could immediately, with a little application, take up her former acts, and the powers would easily find again their liberty and support. We see the contrary in the purification of the sensitive appetite where the impossibility of discussing grows continually. In truth, the darkness of this night does not spread itself in a uniform manner. Some souls at intervals enjoy sensible consolations at prayer. Their frailty does not permit that they be detached from them brusquely. Nevertheless, if they are called to a more perfect state, they penetrate always farther into the darkness of the night, and the work of the purification of the senses will be completed."

To sum up, St. John of the Cross demands three things so that the aridities of the interior life may constitute true passive purifications:

first, that the soul be not attached to any sensible consolations and that she remove herself with perseverance from creatures; secondly, that she continue, in spite of her interior desolation, to serve God faithfully and seek His divine presence; thirdly, that she be no longer able to meditate or employ reasoning; this last sign is the most important.

2. We further recognize the passive purification of the senses by many other circumstances, and these it is important to examine attentively.

Note these favorable indications: (a) if the soul that suffers aridities had formerly received great sensible consolations and felt ardent sentiments of the love of God; (b) if the aridities are rigorous and continual; (c) if the soul that can no longer meditate or excite herself to holy affections, finds herself sometimes fixed on God by a simple glance, and this glance procures her a greater spiritual energy. Finally, if other passive purifications of the senses, such as extraordinary illnesses, persecutions, and so forth, come to strengthen and complete the beneficent action of aridities.

All those favorable circumstances, joined to the signs indicated above, are a bundle of proofs, so to speak, which strengthen one another and end by enlightening the experienced and prudent eye.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

The Effects of the Passive Purification of the Senses

1. It is not enough to have learned what spiritual writers understand by the passive purification of the senses, and what is its specific object; it behooves us to go on to study other matters pertaining to it; and, first, its effects. What are the effects of the passive purification of the senses?

They are of two sorts: the former are shown in the removal of obstacles to perfection; the latter, in a considerable increase of spiritual helps. These different effects will be explained later on. Let it suffice to say here that this division of the effects of the purification of the senses is founded on the action of grace in us. The Holy Ghost, as we are taught by Tauler, effects in us two things. He creates a void in us, then He fills up the void He has made. The void is the first and principal operation. For the emptier we are, the greater the capacity in us to receive. The water must be poured out in order that the fire may enter in. That God may come into us, the creature must be expelled. The animal soul must disappear, that the rational soul may expand. When this first preparation is accomplished, the Holy Ghost at once expedites the second and fills up the capacity of the heart that He has emptied. The effects of the passive purification of the senses in regard to the removal of obstacles that oppose themselves to our union with God consist in this, namely, that it removes (1) the defects or imperfections of the soul; (2) the wanderings of the imagination and the illusions of the devil; (3) the temptations of pride and impurity, and the fatigues of the body.

2. I have said that the passive purification of the senses represses the imperfections of the soul. Sensible consolations sometimes, by the attachment we have to them, become one of the principal causes of our imperfections. They can, if we be not on our guard against them, over-excite the emotions of the sensitive appetite and prevent it from subjecting itself to reason, according to the providential order. By suppressing those consolations at an opportune time God comes to our aid in the work of

our purification. "This night of the senses," says St. John of the Cross, "in extinguishing natural and supernatural satisfactions and in putting an end to all reasoning, delivers the soul herself from all imperfections. The first effect of this aridity is to inspire the soul with respect and reserve in her relations with God. . . . The soul draws another advantage from these trials: it is spiritual humility, a virtue contrary to spiritual pride, which purifies her from all the imperfections she fell into in the hour of her prosperity and early consolations. . . . This dryness also purges the soul of her imperfections in regard to spiritual avarice. Her spiritual avarice was never satisfied; impatient of enjoying, she needed now one exercise, now another. Now, thanks to the darkness of this obscure night, she gives herself to those practices with so much reserve and sobriety that one could accuse her perhaps of sinning by defect. The purification of the senses has for its result to preserve the soul from the stain of spiritual luxury, since those defects proceed habitually from a pleasure of the soul that pours out on the senses.

As for what concerns spiritual gluttony, this obscure night preserves the soul from numerous defects which it is not necessary to mention here. The soul is purified equally from imperfections relating to the three other capital sins: anger, envy, and sloth, and she acquires the contrary virtues. The languors and weaknesses which one feels in spiritual things are no longer faulty because these imperfections, which came formerly from an exaggerated desire of consolation, come no longer from this imperfect appetite, God having put us by this purification of the senses in an entire incapacity in regard to all enjoyment."

3. The passive purification of the senses further shelters us from the wanderings of the imagination. This faculty often desires to give the law to the other powers of the soul: nothing is more important than to control and govern it. God arrives at this end in a very efficacious manner by depriving us of sensible consolations.

In fact, the soul is then so humiliated, is made so submissive by difficulties, temptations, and tribulations of all sorts, that she becomes more sweet and tractable in her relations with God, with herself, and with her neighbor. She is not irritated; she troubles herself no longer with her own faults or those of others. She no longer reproaches God with impatience on account of the disgusts and delays she feels in the work of her perfection. In a word, the imagination, humbled, becomes calm and peaceable, a faithful servant of reason.

For the rest, sensible consolations have not always God for their principle; they can also come from temperament, and even from the devil, who makes use of our natural dispositions to counterfeit divine operations. They are good or bad, according as they flow from a good or a bad principle, and as they lead us to good or evil. Now, it is very difficult, especially for beginners, to discern correctly the true cause of those interior enjoyments. Incertitude and anxiety are begotten in the soul and often place her in a very painful state. The passive purification of the senses delivers us from this interior agitation from the moment that it takes away from us the appetite for sensible things, natural or supernatural.

4. Another effect of the privation of sensible devotion is that it removes the danger of illusions on the part of the devil. A soul tried by aridities and drynesses, if she is faithful to grace, remains more inviolably attached to faith, humility, and obedience, and finds in the

practice of those virtues a greater light and a more persistent energy against those illusions. "In the measure that the soul is purified from the affections of the sensitive appetite," says St. John of the Cross, "she escapes in a marvellous manner from the tyranny of her enemies." In fact, when the soul has stifled every instinct and allurement of sensible satisfactions in herself, the devil, the world, and the flesh no longer have power to attack her.

It cannot be denied that the devil sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, and God permits inexperienced and presumptuous souls to be deceived by the illusions that creep into sensible consolations.

St. Thomas puts this question: "Can the devil lead us to sin by interior temptations?" He replies in the affirmative. The devil, it is true, is deprived of all direct action over our reason and will; but he exercises and concentrates his powers with so much the more violence on our imagination and our sensitive appetite. It is by this that he tries to make us succumb. In fact, the devil can cause certain representative forms to be produced in the imagination and thus cause the sensitive appetite to be moved and troubled by them. The soul, blinded and led by passion, believes she ought to pursue the object that is presented to her imagination, because she considers all that she desires as a real good. It is thus, concludes St. Thomas, that the devil seduces us to sin by interior temptations. Now, the passive purification of the senses in suppressing the appetite for sensible things, natural and supernatural, takes away every sort of aliment from those temptations of the devil.

5. The passive purification of the senses also removes temptations of pride. Sensible consolations, even those that certainly come from God, are often enough the occasions of falling into this sin. The inexperience and imperfection of souls that commence to give themselves to God, and the numerous temptations of the devil, easily entice them towards this hidden snare.

There are four sorts of pride: (1) to believe that one possesses of himself what he has received from God; (2) to attribute to one's own merits what one has received gratuitously; (3) to glorify oneself because of a good one does not possess; (4) to desire to draw the regards of others upon oneself to the contempt of others. The soul that enjoys spiritual sweetnesses is frequently exposed to those four snares of pride. On the contrary, the soul tried in the crucible of passive purification of the senses finds in her want and humiliation a sure shelter against those dangerous temptations. Virtue triumphs in weakness.

6. The passive purification of the senses removes from us tribulations of the flesh. Consolations and spiritual sweetnesses can have grievous reactions in the senses. This phenomenon, according to St. Thomas, is founded on the intimate union of body and soul, and on the reciprocal influence that results from this union. St. Bonaventure speaks of it in clear and instructive terms. St. Teresa has likewise treated of this delicate point in two letters addressed to her brother. Here is the explanation and the counsels she gives on the subject: "As to those tribulations which you experience in prayer, pay no attention to them. As for me, I have never felt anything of the like, because God in His goodness has always delivered me from those feelings, but I think they must come from the excessive pleasure with which the soul is affected and which diffuses itself abroad. They will pass away with the grace of God, provided that you pay no attention to them." In another place St. Teresa adds: "As

to the emotions of the senses, I have told you what to do. I find this is indifferent in prayer and the best thing is to pay no attention to them."

We see, then, if those tribulations of the flesh ought not to disquiet timorous souls, it is no less true that, as a result of "the excessive pleasure with which the soul is affected," there is produced in the senses something very disagreeable. The passive purification of the senses gives an efficacious remedy for this inconvenience in suppressing all sweetnesses and sensible consolations.

7. Lastly, the passive purification of the senses is useful in the point of view of bodily strength. Sweetnesses and sensible consolations are graces and encouragements to good when God judges it proper to favor us with them; but they can also, through our own fault, become the cause of a general enervation which weakens the body and extends even to the faculties of the soul. This corporal weakness sometimes goes so far that one can no longer give himself up to exercises of piety. He then becomes discouraged: he languishes in spiritual torpor, and in place of advancing in the way of perfection, he goes backward from day to

day. It is a fact confirmed by experience that an indiscreet devotion, by weakening the body, causes the soul to fall into tepidity and discouragement. The divine intervention which takes place in the passive purification of the senses, suppresses the danger of which we speak here. The soul, saturated with sensible consolations, would not perhaps have the courage to control herself in the practices of devotion. God arrests her on this perilous declivity and gives her new strength and greater generosity in the work of perfecting herself.

What are we to do to dispose ourselves to profit by the first effects of the passive purification of the senses, which consist, as I have said, in the removal of obstacles to our perfection?

We must exercise ourselves generously in the *active purification* of the senses; that is to say, we must mortify our senses, exercise a great vigilance over them, and employ them solely for the greater glory of God and for our own sanctification.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

The Passive Purification of the Senses Procures an Increase of Spiritual Helps

I

1. Our last conference showed how the passive purification of the senses removes obstacles to perfection: let us now learn how it confers on us an increase of spiritual helps. These helps are two, namely: (a) a more perfect knowledge of God and of ourselves, and (b) virtues more elevated and solid. As to the former effect, it is shown us clearly by the great teacher of the mysteries of the "dark night of the soul," St. John of the Cross. "In this night or purification of the senses," he says, "it seems to the soul that all is taken away from her, and, meanwhile, she is loaded by it with considerable benefits. . . . The first of these is the knowledge of herself and of her misery. In truth, all the graces with which God favors the soul are ordinarily accompanied with this knowledge; but aridities, the privation of the abundant

sweetnesses that before now filled her powers, and the difficulty that she feels in doing good, oblige her to acknowledge and confess her baseness and misery, of which she was not sufficiently conscious in the time of her prosperity.

"Another benefit of this dryness of the sensitive appetite is that God enlightens the soul and gives her a knowledge not only of her own misery and unworthiness, but, further, of the greatness and excellence of her Creator. The spirit delivered from sensible tastes and attachments remains pure and free to receive the Truth; for the sensitive appetites and desires, even when they have for object spiritual things, always embarrass and trouble the spirit. . . . This is what Isaias explains very well when he says: 'To whom shall the Lord give knowledge and understanding? To those who have been withdrawn and torn from the breasts.' (Is. xxviii, 9.) Hence, we conclude that the best preparation for divine communications is not so much this first milk of spiritual sweetness which comes from reasoning and other operations of the powers of the soul, as detachment and the privation of those interior delights.

"David also sets forth admirably the power and efficacy of this night to communicate to the soul a sublime knowledge of God. 'I have come before you,' says he, 'in a desert land, where there is no path and no water, as into your sanctuary, to contemplate your power and glory'—a most remarkable thing. The prophet does not say that spiritual sweetnesses are dispositions proper to know the greatness of God; it is rather the aridity of the sensitive part signified by the dry and desert land. Neither does he say that holy thoughts and heavenly conversations, such as he had frequently enjoyed, had led him to divine attributes. It was, on the contrary, the impossibility of fixing his thought on God and of making use of discussions and considerations which the imagination furnishes, as is expressed by the land without a path. In short, to arrive at the knowledge of God and of oneself the means *par excellence* is the obscure night with its drynesses and agonies."

2. Let us now see how the passive purification of the senses procures us more elevated and solid virtues. The exercise of all the virtues, as we are told by St. John of the Cross, "is also one of the immense benefits of the state of which we speak. Such are: (a) the patience and longanimity that shine in drynesses when one perseveres in them; (b) the love of

God; for it is no longer by taste or attraction but from a very pure motive that one is carried to do good; (c) the virtue of fortitude, since the soul filled with bitterness and loaded with difficulties is greatly strengthened in her holy practices, and draws vigor even in her weakness; (d) finally, all the virtues, theological and moral, reign during those aridities."

Elsewhere St. John of the Cross devotes himself more particularly to the love of neighbor and to obedience. "Seeing herself so sterile and miserable," he says, "it is impossible for the soul to believe herself better than others. On the contrary, she is convinced of her inferiority. Here commences love of neighbor. The soul no longer permits herself to judge as she did before, when she admired her own fervor and closed her eyes on that of others. Now, stricken with her spiritual poverty and weakness, she no longer casts her eyes on anyone. . . . Those whom God holds in this state become perfectly obedient and submissive in the ways of perfection. Convinced of their littleness and incapacity, they willingly accept the teachings one gives them. They are ready to receive the advice of all the world and they even desire to be instructed on their least duties."

Here we may be permitted to inquire what we are to do to favor the second effect of the passive purification of the senses, which consists in an increase of spiritual helps.

We must not only mortify the passions, but regulate also as much as possible the imagination, the great purveyor of all the motions of the sensitive appetite, by removing from it all useless or dangerous preoccupations, and by directing its activity towards objects capable of carrying it to good. All the exercises of piety and, in particular, the assiduous practice of prayer, are capable of nourishing and augmenting the virtues which God demands of souls called to perfection.

II

1. Someone may say: Is there not a sort of spiritual damage in the privation of sensible consolations? To this I reply:

There can be no spiritual damage in the privation of sensible consolations, since it is the work of God and a veritable grace that is accorded us in view of infused contemplation. Sensible consolations are precious without doubt when God sends them to draw us to Him and to encourage us in the practice of good.

But it is still more advantageous to be separated from them, since this privation prepares us very effectively for graces of a superior order. For the rest, we must not forget that these sensible sweetnesses, even those that come neither from temperament nor from the devil, can be met with sometimes in imperfect, nay, even in sinful souls, and were they always accorded to the just, it would not remain less true that they are of an inferior rank and appropriate to the dispositions of those who are beginners. The soul that aspires to a higher perfection and to more intimate graces ought to be purified beforehand from all those enjoyments of the inferior and sensitive part.

"As to the effect of divine love," says Tauler, "it appears sometimes extraordinary, as in an extreme joy, a fervent devotion, or something of that sort; but it is not this that is better or more noble, since these exterior signs can be found without true charity, and since nature often produces in us those sweetnesses and pleasures, or God permits the evil spirit to excite them so as to have us esteemed by others. It is not, then, he who is most abundantly filled with them that we ought to esteem the most holy; but we must examine with care if it is

God who loads him with those favors, and why He loads him with them; because often His mercy gives those consolations only to encourage the soul to raise herself to greater perfection and to preserve her in sanctity. This is why, from the moment the privileged soul advances in perfect charity, God withdraws from her little by little the joy of those sweetnesses. To suppose that one is faithful to God in those consolations, one must always examine whether this fidelity comes truly from a principle of charity; and when this is so, it does not follow that this state was perfect."

Elsewhere Tauler says: "Many allow themselves to be seduced by spiritual sweetness, following too much its attraction, abandoning themselves to it with irregularity, seeking it, and trusting in it with excess. Whilst spiritual sweetness is without doubt a great good (when it comes from God), when one delivers oneself to it and possesses it with pleasure, nature finds in it somewhat of a satisfaction, and there where one believes himself to receive God, one receives only pleasure. It is important, therefore, to know whether one seeks God or nature." The privation of sensible consolations here is not a spiritual damage, but a true grace.

2. An important question is: What must we do to profit by aridities of the passive purification of the senses? We must join to the interior dispositions of faith and generosity the simplicity and docility which move the soul to permit herself to be conducted by the counsels of experience. St. John of the Cross and Tauler will again be our masters and guides.

"When those aridities beset the soul," says St. John of the Cross, "God makes her pass from the way of the senses to that of the spirit; that is to say, from meditation to contemplation, where she can neither operate of herself nor discuss. The manner of governing herself well in this night of the senses is, not to put herself in pain concerning meditation, since this is no longer the time to employ it; but to abandon herself to repose and tranquillity when even she would believe that this repulsion of the spirit for action is a result of carelessness. It is much, then, to possess oneself in patience and to persevere in prayer. In spite of all the scruples with which those souls can be beset over the loss of time and the better employment they could make of it, let them be well persuaded that one does not go to prayer to bind the spirit, *but to put it at large and dilate it.* In fact, the spontaneous activity of the faculties will serve only to trouble the action of God and to prevent the happy impressions which are engraven on the soul by means of this peace and apparent inaction. Nevertheless, we cannot found on this doctrine a general rule to put meditation absolutely aside. To quit it, it must be no longer in our power to employ it, because God has stopped the course of it."

"If it happens to thee to fall into this state of spiritual aridity," says Tauler, "do nothing to come out of it. Guard thyself well from seeking, or even simply receiving with pleasure, exterior consolations, which would take away from thy soul recollection; but content thyself to remain within thyself, and if thy sins present themselves to thee and torment thy conscience by lively and poignant remorse, seek not to escape from this importunate remembrance, but judge thyself on the contrary more severely still." These are without doubt very perfect counsels, but let us not forget that the soul of which there is question here is called in a sublime way, and that God, who is always master of His gifts, may demand of this soul conditions agreeable to those signal graces.

For the rest, Tauler shows us in another place how the soul is mercifully prepared for this detachment. "It is," he says, "because many love those spiritual gifts (of the inferior and sensitive part) that God takes them away from them and leaves them poor and indigent, dry and languishing, that so they may learn to have recourse to Him without attaching themselves to spiritual consolations, and may serve Him solely by faith, hope, and charity, and that they may learn to mortify themselves, to suffer through love spiritual confusion, and to confide only in God, in His infinite goodness and mercy. . . . A truly pious man may in truth taste of the gifts of God, desire for himself and others spiritual consolations, in as far as they may aid him to glorify God, and obtain beatitude, by rendering the practice of virtues more easy and by conducting him more promptly and surely toward God; but when the soul, by the aid of this spiritual relish that God has given her, comes to the point where the taste for temporal things is diminished in her, it is time that she take the route that we have indicated above. For if she remain in this first state, as if it were all that is best for her, she will never attain the True and Sovereign Good."

Such is the conduct to observe in aridities and drynesses. We can sum it up thus: remain in peace, and do nothing to come out of this state.

SIXTH CONFERENCE

Trials Pertaining to the Passive Purification of the Senses (I)

I

The way of perfection is the way of trial and purification. We have already considered some of the trials with which God proves and prepares us for the great privilege of infused contemplation. Let us now consider some further trials which God makes use of in the passive purification of souls. They are: (1) the privation of exterior worldly goods; (2) bodily afflictions; (3) the persecutions of men; (4) those of the devil, and lastly, (5) temptations against chastity.

Exterior goods are of three sorts: (a) material goods, (b) the sweet bonds of family and friendship, (c) dignities and honors.

We must acknowledge that perfect detachment in the possession of those goods is very rare, even with those who labor for their sanctification; for our corrupt nature allows itself to be drawn more easily by visible than by invisible objects. What does God do? In His mercy He detaches us from those exterior, temporal goods by taking them away from us. It is thus that He conducts us to the highest contemplation. The operation is sometimes very painful, but it is salutary and rich in supernatural fruits.

(a) It is the counsel of our Master that those who aspire to perfection ought, in the first place, to despoil themselves of their riches. "If thou wilt be perfect," is His injunction to the young man in the Gospel, "go, sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor; and thou shalt have a treasure in heaven: then, come and follow Me." This counsel was very opportune, since he to whom it was addressed, too closely attached to his riches, was saddened by it and went away.

This young man desired perfection; but unhappily for himself, he possessed great riches. Hence, our Lord, to show clearly the importance of detachment from worldly goods, hastened to add: "The rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven." It is not easy in truth, even for souls desirous of perfection, to follow Jesus Christ faithfully in the midst of riches and worldly goods, and for this reason we must in certain cases despoil ourselves of them, or allow ourselves to be despoiled of them by God, if we wish to participate in the most intimate graces of contemplation.

(b) We must deprive ourselves of the consolations of family and friends in order to be disposed for infused contemplation. It is the saying of Tauler that if many temporal goods cannot possess the same heart at the same time, how could we at the same time love transient goods, and eternal ones? Divine consolations are incompatible with the joys of earth. It is for this reason that God deprives certain predestined souls of the pure joys of family and friends, and introduces them into the high regions of an affection purely and entirely spiritual. Behold how St. Teresa replies to objections that one could make on this subject. "You will say to me: 'Those souls do not know how to love, or to pay a return of affection one has for them.' At least I can reply: 'They scarcely care to be loved.' Meanwhile they cease not to be grateful for it, and it is in recommending to God those by whom they are loved, that they pay them for their love! . . . 'But is it not natural even in a becoming and lawful love to desire to be loved, when we ourselves love?' I avow it; nevertheless, when we have been paid in this money, which seems to us so precious, what do we take possession of, if not of light straws, which the wind carries away—air, emptiness? It is, then, on a just title that those divinely enlightened souls care little whether they be loved or not and that they seek even the affection of those who can be useful for their salvation only because they know well that it belongs to human weakness to get tired in a little while if a devout hand do not sustain them in their career." God, therefore, suppresses all human attachment in the souls whom He calls to the highest perfection and to contemplation. The ties of family and friendship are purified, but not destroyed.

(c) The privation of honors and dignities disposes us to infused contemplation.

Honors and dignities can be hurtful to us in three ways: (1) when we desire them beyond our means; (2) when we do not refer them to God, but to ourselves; (3) when we do not propose to ourselves to make them serve to the advantage of our neighbor.

God causes us to escape this triple danger when He permits us to remain in oblivion and in a low rank. There is more; humiliations, when generously accepted, bring the most precious graces and draw the soul by a sure way to the summit of contemplation.

II

Again, God sends bodily afflictions to prepare souls for infused contemplation. These are all afflictions coming from the loss of health, beauty, etc., and are produced ordinarily in a fashion to disconcert science. They appear often without apparent cause and sometimes disappear on a sudden, especially when the temporal or spiritual interest of the neighbor seems to demand it. It is worthy of remark that bodily afflictions can have a miraculous character, without being for all that a sign of infused contemplation, as God can employ natural infirmities and common maladies to arrive at the end that He proposes to Himself in the passive purification of the senses.

Here let me say that it is not easy, rather, it is very difficult, to know whether or not bodily afflictions are sent by God to prepare the soul for infused contemplation. This is so especially with women, because of certain, often very singular phenomena which are the effects of nervous temperament. For the rest, authors are all in accord in recommending great circumspection and reserve on this subject. We can sum up thus their opinions on bodily afflictions of souls called to a high perfection: (1) we must not easily see in them a passive purification; (2) when in doubt, it helps much more to see in them a simple trial or punishment of God. These two rules are excellent, no matter whether the bodily affliction can be explained naturally, or whether it may have a miraculous character.

Bodily afflictions prepare us in a very efficacious manner for infused contemplation, by subjecting the flesh to the spirit. This is one of the most distinctive signs of the true friends of God. Satan himself makes the avowal of it when he demands of God to send this trial on holy Job. "As for the rest," the devil said to God, "stretch forth your hand and strike his bones and his flesh, and then you shall see if he will not curse you before your face." *"As for the rest,"* says St. Thomas in his commentary on Job, *i. e.,* "If you don't wish to believe me, *stretch forth your hand by afflicting* his body, not only *his flesh,* but *his bones,* so as to penetrate to the inmost of his being; *and then you shall* see, and others shall see with you, *if he will not* curse you to your face." God wished to show that Job had not served Him up to this moment as a mercenary, for temporal goods, or even in return for his health. Then *the Lord said to Satan: "he is in your hand,"* that is to say, "I give you permission to afflict his body, but touch not his life, by causing him to die." God does not deliver His servants entirely to Satan, but solely in a just measure; "for God is faithful, and He permits not that one be tempted beyond his strength." Satan delays not to realize his project: *Having gone out from before the Lord, he struck Job* with a shameful and terrible malady, with a painful and incurable ulcer, which Scripture calls *malignant;* all his person was covered with it, *from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.* Ordinarily one comes in aid of maladies by remedies and lenitives: but it was not thus with Job. God prepared him for the highest contemplation: He wished to make a prophet of him.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

Trials Pertaining to the Passive Purification of the Senses (II)

I

God employs the persecutions not only of the devil, but also of men, in the passive purification of the senses. According to St. Paul, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Tim. iii, 12.) *"Godly,"* says St. Thomas, "can be taken in a double sense: for piety which is applied to the divine worship . . . or again, for mercy towards the neighbor. 'Piety is useful to all things' (1 Tim. iv, 8); 'all those who wish to live with piety towards Jesus Christ' (Tit. ii, 12), that is to say, who observe the precepts of the Christian religion 'with temperance, justice and piety in this world,' *will be persecuted.* Likewise, *all those who wish to live piously,* that is to say, to practise mercy in regard to their neighbors, *will be persecuted in Jesus Christ.*

At first sight this prediction of the Apostle appears to apply only to the persecutions on the part of the wicked. There is more, however. 'Those who wish to live piously in Jesus Christ will be persecuted' even by the good. Just so the formation of souls called to the most intimate communication with God almost always demands it. Those persecutions are of a great variety and of a marvelous propriety." St. Teresa gives us an abridged list of them. "These are," she says, "the judgments and murmurs of persons with whom one ordinarily converses, or even of those with whom one has not any relations, and who never, it would seem, ought to think of us. They say that such a one wishes to pass for a saint; that she gives herself up to those exercises only to deceive the world and to appear to excel others, who nevertheless are better than she without all those ceremonies. And remark that she does nothing singular, but tries only to fulfill well the duties of her state. What is to her more sensible, is that her friends withdraw from her and are precisely those who hold in her regard the most biting conversations. 'This soul,' they say, 'is deceived and greatly mistaken. . . . She is deceived by the devil, just like so and so. . . .

She brings discredit on the practice of virtue, and deceives her confessors.' This is not all. They wish to see the confessors themselves; hold like conversations with them; cite examples, and forget nothing that can throw doubts upon their conduct. . . . What is most painful is that this trial, instead of passing away quickly, sometimes lasts for a whole lifetime, because the persons who hold a judgment so disadvantageous to souls who are in this state, cease not to render all their actions suspected."

II

1. Let us now learn in what dispositions we must be in order to profit from persecutions.

It is through a great confidence in God and an unalterable patience that we shall obtain the crown reserved for those who have suffered persecution for truth and justice' sake. Here the remembrance of the example and promises of Jesus Christ is indispensable. "Oh, that we had need," says Tauler, "of those living instruments of cruelty, of those fierce and unpitiable hearts who nailed Jesus Christ to the cross, since it was their barbarous actions that effected the accomplishment and fulness of His glory and ours! But those same instruments, those inhuman and envenomed hearts, are not less necessary even to the last day for the trial and preparation of the just for glory! For, according to the Gospel, as 'it was necessary that Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory,' so must the elect, who are His living members, arrive at their glory by suffering. Remember, however, holy soul, in whatever bitterness you may be plunged, to retrace in your memory, in order to strengthen your courage, all the words of consolation that Jesus Christ has left us, as this, for example: 'I reserve for you the kingdom that My Father has given Me.' "

We must also learn in what dispositions we must be to profit well by the persecutions that come to us on the part of the good. It is, then, especially that we must be animated with lively sentiments of faith. Behold, according to Tauler, with what a supernatural spirit we must face this trial, without contradiction one of the most painful. "I tell you in truth," he continues, "that God would permit a hundred thousand souls to be exposed to some danger on the occasion of this soul whom He has raised so high, and whom He has chosen by a grace all particular of His love, rather than not to prepare her for this glory by suffering. On this point He would even cast for a time into darkness and blindness an infinity of holy persons, in order that they might prepare this vessel of election by rash judgments concerning her, passed in this state of ignorance. After having thus purified this sacred vessel, He would remove the bandage from their eyes and would not treat with rigor a fault they committed by a hidden dispensation of His admirable providence. He would manifest openly, in the brilliancy of His divine light, this vessel of pure gold, enriched with precious stones. I say more; God would send an angel from Heaven to dispose by tribulations this cherished vase, as we read that He sent one formerly to the holy patriarch, Jacob, rather than allow it to remain unpurified."

2. Certainly the trial of the elect is not always an ordinary trial. Often the sufferings God sends them when they little think of it, are so unheard of and so far above common sufferings, that they never conceived their like, or even apprehended anything that approached them.

Be you firm, therefore, and take courage, O soul afflicted for Jesus Christ! This Spouse, whom you have chosen, enters into your heart in the midst of your afflictions in order to shed new delights and extraordinary consolations. Bear patiently the evils that you feel. Allow not any of your crosses to escape without drawing advantage from them, but say within yourself: 'O Lord, my God, I offer You this affliction, which is well due to me, although unwilling! I join it to, and unite it with, Your adorable Passion, in order that, being united to the virtue and merit of Your sufferings, this union may render it agreeable in the eyes of Your Father, as Your Passion rendered useful and salutary that of the thief who was attached with You to the cross!"

St. Teresa thus depicts the sentiments of a generous soul in presence of this persecution: "These discourses, instead of saddening and casting down the soul, rejoice and strengthen her, because experience has made known to her the precious advantages she draws from them. It seems to her even that those who treat her so unjustly, do not offend God, but that, on the contrary, God permits it thus with the design of enriching her, and as she knows visibly that her adversaries cause her to advance in virtue, she conceives for them a particular tenderness, and believes that they love her more truly than those who speak well of her."

Even the praises of men are sometimes occasions of suffering to the elect. "Those praises," says St. Teresa, "are for the soul a new pain. Indeed, seeing clearly that if she has any good, she has received it from God, and that it comes not in any manner from herself, she suffers, in the beginning especially, an unbearable torment when she hears herself praised. Later on her displeasure diminishes for various reasons. The first, because experience shows her that men bringing themselves with the same facility to say the good as the bad, and the bad as the good, we ought to despise their talk. The second, because, discovering with a more vivid light that all the good that is in her is a pure gift of our Lord, she does not attribute it to herself more than if she saw it in another person, and thus she gives all the glory of it to God. The third, because, having seen other persons profit by the graces she has received from God, she thinks that He wished to employ the good opinion they have of her as a means of benefiting their souls. The fourth, because, having before her eyes only the glory of her Master, without occupying herself with her own, she finds herself delivered from the apprehension, ordinary in beginners, lest praise become for her, as for so many others, a cause of ruin. Thus she troubles herself very little as to whether men have esteem for her or not, and desires solely to be able to contribute to God's glory without putting herself to pain as to the rest.

"These and other reasons soften the pain those praises give her. Nevertheless, she feels from them always a certain suffering, if only when she pays attention to them. But the soul suffers incomparably more at seeing herself esteemed without reason by all the world, than at seeing herself blamed by discourses to her disadvantage. When she has come to the point of being insensible to the praises that are given her, she troubles herself still less concerning what people say against her."

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

Persecutions of the Devil

I

1. When treating of the trials which the just have to undergo during the period of the passive purification of the senses, there is one that must by no means be forgotten, and that is, the trial coming from the persecutions of the devil. Those persecutions are more frequent and bitter than people ordinarily conceive, and they comprise all that one can have to suffer on the part of the evil one: temptations, illusions, obsession, sometimes even possession.

Before entering into the details of those persecutions, it is important to recall a principle concerning which we spoke elsewhere, and which must guide us in the examination of this question. The action of the devil does not pass the sensible part of our being, and cannot in any case be exercised *directly* either on the intellect or on the will. With the permission of

God the devil has the power of attacking us by exciting the phantoms of our imagination and the passions of the sensitive appetite. He has the power to act upon exterior objects, even upon our bodies, so as to urge us to sin; but his power goes no further. The flesh and the world furnish him with all too efficient auxiliaries, by whose attacks we are only too often overcome.

Indeed, by reason of the intimate union that exists between the inferior and the superior part of our soul, the attraction for evil creeps easily into the intellect and the will, and the action of the devil remains, although limited to sensible things, a formidable power against which we must fight with circumspection, humility, and confidence in God.

The first kind of persecution is, I have said, that known as temptations of the devil. Now under that generic name we understand all the suggestions and inspirations of Satan. However, we give this name more particularly to impetuous and violent motions; and we call illusions, the malign operations that insinuate themselves into the inferior part of the soul in an imperceptible manner. In temptations the devil acts on certain interior sensible faculties with great energy; but he does not dominate them totally, and does not actually reside in the soul.

2. Obsession is a manifest persecution of the devil. In obsession, the diabolical action can be exercised in three ways: (1) By preventing the free action of the faculties. Those whom the devil persecutes in this manner are often constrained and violent in their actions. They feel in particular that their imagination is, so to speak, bound by thick darkness, and they feel on their heart a weight that oppresses them, in such sort, however, that they can perceive that the cause of their torment is foreign and exterior; for the devil tries in vain to hide himself. Persons with even a little experience clearly distinguish the effects of human infirmity from malign operations which have for their object to fatigue the man and to trouble him in his actions. (2) By afflicting the body and making it suffer great pains, or rather, by acting maliciously about the person obsessed. The devils have the custom of making noise in order to cause fear and to make an impression on the exterior, of knocking, of causing the obsessed one to suffer great torments in the bowels and nerves, of causing

obstructions and swellings in them, and even still more serious maladies, as appears by the example of Job. (3) By urging to evil through abominable artifices, sometimes even by open violence. Those are motions which lead to evil, but so vehement that the obsessed persons know without difficulty that the devil is the author of them. They feel him operating within them in order to lead them to the vice contrary to purity by abominable artifices which could come only from the unclean spirit. And sometimes he attacks them by open force, as if he wished to use violence against them.

3. Obsession, through the providential permission of God, is a great means of passive purification of the senses. It is also called the *diabolic siege.* "In the diabolic siege," says Scaramelli, "the devil remains before the person whom he besieges, as a general with his troops remains before the fortress or castle that he besieges; and, what matters more, he has not any stable and permanent power over the body of the besieged, a thing that can be shown clearly; for, the time of the purification being finished, the devil, without exorcisms, without injunction, and without any particular industry being employed for his expulsion, himself

raises the siege and goes away; a thing that would not certainly be if he had taken possession of the body, as in fact he never abandons the bodies of demoniacs whom he holds in his possession.

4. Possession is a very malignant persecution of the devil, which reproduces with intensity the three effects of obsession that we have signalized, and adds to them two aggravating characters: (1) In possession the devil not only takes away the free use of the faculties of man, but himself speaks and acts by the organ of possession without the possessed one perceiving it or being able to prevent it. (2) By possession the devil exercises his malign operations from within; for he dwells and remains in the bodies of those whom he possesses. By obsession the devil causes his action to be felt from without; this is the diabolic siege. For the rest, it is exceedingly rare that possession is seen in souls called to contemplation and intimate union with God: it is a punishment rather than a purifying trial.

5. You will ask: By what signs can we know that obsession has reference to the passive purification of the senses?

To know this, we must before all attentively consider whether the person obsessed labors seriously for his perfection. Besides, we are not without examples of astute souls who by their discourses and grimaces seek to have themselves pass for victims of the devil. We ought to avoid two extremes in the examination of obsession: seeing the action of the devil everywhere; and not seeing it at all.

Obsession, as well as possession, reveals itself by mysterious and inexplicable signs, humanly speaking. Possession carries with it characters even more extraordinary. Nevertheless, simple obsession ought to affirm itself by something sufficiently sensible. The principal mark common to obsessed and possessed persons is to reply to thoughts and to discover hidden things. We shall see in a little while in what sense we are to understand this.

Here are the most certain signs of true possession: to speak a tongue one has never learned; to say things evidently above one's capacity; not to remember what one said or did during possession. The responses obtained through exorcisms are also a sign of possession, but we ought to give credence to them only with great reserve.

You will wonder why God permits the devils to exercise their malice on holy souls. It is in order to purify them the more and to raise them to the most intimate communication with Himself. All those persecutions, whatever their number and violence, come not only from the malice of the devil, but also from the will of God, who in His infinite wisdom rules the conditions of the combat and employs the evil that the devil would wish to do us to draw a greater good from it.

We shall cite here a passage from a very curious and rare book. "It is an assured thing," says Father Sebastian Michaelis, O.P., "that there are a great number of malignant spirits who dwell in the dark regions of the upper air and who descend to earth. God permits it by His providence, first of all, to give employment to them who are His creatures, but only in vile offices, as a king or a civil governor is wont to condemn certain malefactors to offices which bring them no profit, but only pain and labor, and solely for the good of the public! Secondly, for our exercise, as St. Bernard, following St. Jerome, applies it to the Jebusites, the Philistines, and other Gentile peoples who were left by divine permission within the limits of the Promised Land, and this in order to exercise the people of Israel who otherwise would easily rebel against the orders of God. They were a figure of the malignant spirits, whom Jesus Christ should leave in the air after His death and Passion, in order to exercise us in good, even as the unfruitful and sterile sand serves to cleanse and brighten vessels of gold and silver that are carefully guarded in the great mansion of the Father of the family. Thus were exercised Job and, all the good, even to St. Paul, who in his second Epistle to the Corinthians writes that he endured the buffets of Satan (2 Cor. xii). In his Epistle to the Ephesians he also makes mention of this design of our Reedeemer, who wished first of all through the merits of His precious Passion and death to arm us from head to foot as true champions of God. 'Put ye on,' he says, 'the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the assaults of the devil.' (Eph. vi, 12–16.)

" 'The sword,' he says, 'is the word of God; the shield is faith; the helmet is hope; the breastplate is holy charity.' And St. Peter in his first Epistle warns us to 'be sober and watch,' because, he says, 'your adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, whom resist ye, strong in faith.' (1 Pet. v, 8, 9.)

"Protected by those arms the devil can do nothing, yes, absolutely nothing against us: for, as has been well said, he overcomes only those who are unwilling to resist.

"Being set in this manner before us, the devils have a bridle; it is God's Providence, which, through the ministry of the good angels or otherwise, as it seems good to Him, so restrains their rage and malice that they cannot do what otherwise they could do, even by their natural power, and must, before they do anything, demand permission of God. Thus we see Satan obliged to ask permission of God to afflict Job in his person and in his goods, and the devils of whom mention is made in the Gospel dare not enter the swine without the express permission of Christ."

II

1. Here let me say that God permits the devil to tempt in a special manner just souls against the holy virtue of chastity. Just souls who commence to give themselves to God, are rarely exempt from this sort of tribulation. Sometimes this trial is pushed to the utmost

limits in order to purify the more quickly souls whom God destines for a high perfection. "During this frightful night," says St. John of the Cross, "the angel of Satan, that is to say, the spirit of fornication, attacks certain ones with this affliction and fatigues their senses with violent and abominable temptations. He fills their minds with horrible thoughts, he troubles their imagination with the most lively representations. Finally, he causes them to suffer torments more cruel than death itself." You will wonder how it can be that a soul is purified by temptations against chastity.

St. Thomas, in his commentary on St. Paul, explains this phenomenon in a very ingenious and consoling manner. St. Paul had said: "And lest the greatness of the revelations given me might exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan to buffet me." "Often," says the Angelic Doctor, "a skillful physician causes or permits a malady in order to cure a more dangerous one. The Apostle, in the text we have read, shows that something similar was done in him by the Heavenly Physician, our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed the Divine Saviour, the great Physician of souls, sometimes permits His friends, even the most perfect, to be afflicted in their bodies in order to cure their souls; and, what is more, to prevent them from falling into great faults, He permits them to commit apparent ones. It is thus that the Lord conducted Himself in regard to St. Paul: *'God permitted,'* for my utility and humiliation, *'that I suffer a sting of my flesh';* that is to say, violent temptations that pursued me everywhere. This temptation that pursued me unceasingly is *'the angel of Satan,'* whom God authorized to tempt me. He was the true envoy of Satan, for the intention of this enemy was to destroy me, but the will of God was to humble and purify me.

"The Apostle greatly desired to be delivered from this temptation, and he prayed unceasingly with this intention: *'For which thing thrice I besought the Lord, that it might depart from me.'* Remark here that a sick person, who is ignorant of the purpose of the physician in applying a painful remedy, begs of him to be delivered from it; but the physician insists and pursues his beneficent ministry. He has only one thing in view, namely, to cure the sufferer. The Apostle acted here like this sick person. He asked God three times to be delivered from this temptation; but God replied to him: '*My grace is sufficient for thee.*' It is as if He had said: 'It is not necessary that this infirmity disappear; it is not dangerous, because My grace strengthens thee. It is not necessary that concupiscence cease to solicit thee to evil, because My grace protects thee.' "

We need not be astonished, then, at temptations against chastity, however painful they may be, and still less should we be discouraged at them; for if we are faithful to grace, we are sure of obtaining a magnificent reward. "The temptations of the flesh and the attacks of the evil spirit," says Tauler, "are a sort of preparation. The soul that knows how to profit by them will invariably remain subject to the orders of God; however unruly, however impure may be the thoughts that rise up in her, if at the moment of their appearance she turns to God by fervent desires, those shameful thoughts are banished and disappear without the soul's receiving any stain from their contagious approach, as long as the will refuses to give them its consent. . . . It belongs to divine justice to reward even by a hundredfold this action, by grace in this life, and by the chaste and unalterable pleasures of glory in Heaven."

2. What, then, must we do in order to resist temptations against chastity?

Among the means we can employ we point out the following, more particularly recommended by St. Thomas: (1) We must apply our minds with an always increasing fervor, to prayer and the contemplation of divine things; (2) We must be penetrated more and more with the science of the saints, by reading the Holy Scriptures and works of piety; (3) We must nourish our mind and heart with holy thoughts and employ ejaculatory prayers; (4) We must never remain idle, and must occupy ourselves as much as possible with manual labor; (5) We must remove those dangerous impressions by preoccupations of another kind and by exercises of exterior mortification. Need I add another means, the most efficacious of all? We must cultivate a tender and lifelong devotion to the Mother of chaste love, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

NINTH CONFERENCE

The Passive Purification of the Spirit (I)

1. In order that we may attain to an intimate union with God and to the privilege of infused contemplation, we have need not only of the passive purification of the senses, but also of a similar purification of the spirit.

Now, the passive purification of the spirit is an assemblage of interior pains, and principally a withdrawal of the agreeable sense of devotion which God causes to be felt even in the superior part of the soul by means of a very vivid purifying light. Its purpose is to complete the purification of the sensitive appetite, to subject the reason to God, and thus to prepare the union of mystic transformation. In seeing, on the one hand, the goodness and grandeur of Him whom she has offended, and, on the other, her own baseness and malice, the soul enters on a sort of agony and sees herself reduced to a state bordering on despair.

It may seem strange that a soul already advanced in perfection should be deprived of a thing so holy as devotion. To this I say that the passive purification of the spirit no more takes away *essential* devotion than the passive purification of the senses. The soul continues to serve God with the same fidelity and the same eagerness as before. The passive purification of the senses deprived her of *accidental* devotion in the sensible part: the passive purification of the spirit deprives her totally of *accidental* devotion, that is to say, of every agreeable sentiment, even in the intellectual part of the soul. She is then plunged into a dense darkness, caused by a very brilliant light, with which God inundates her in order to complete her purification by suffering.

Father Scaramelli thus sums up this question: "I have said, with the Angelic Doctor, that devotion, as to its substance, consists in a will prompt to consecrate itself to God and to the things that pertain to His service and honor. I have said again that this prompt will can procure in the sensitive appetite a sweet and delicious affection, which is called *accidental sensible* devotion, and in the privation of this devotion consists the sensible aridity which is proper to the purification of the senses. I have said once again that this prompt will, to which is reduced all the substance of devotion, although it does not descend to the senses, can produce in the spirit a certain vigor, a certain consolation, which is called *accidental spiritual* devotion. In the privation of this devotion consists the spiritual aridity which is proper to purification of the spirit. In fact, the soul constituted in this state is well disposed for all that pertains to the service of God, and accomplishes without any resistance all that is pleasing to Him; but it is without any sentiment, without the least attraction, not only in the sensitive part, but even in the spiritual part of the soul."

2. How can it be, it will be asked, that a very vivid and brilliant light will bring about a dense darkness and will be a subject of pains and torments? St. John of the Cross replies admirably to this question. "This obscure night," he says, "is an influence of God upon the soul, which delivers her from her ignorance and habitual imperfections, natural as well as supernatural. Contemplatives call it infused contemplation, or *mystic theology*. God teaches the soul secretly by it, and perfects her in His love. One has only to apply oneself lov-

ingly to God, to hear Him, and to receive His lights without seeking to comprehend how this infused contemplation is produced, because it is the loving wisdom of God that produces those particular effects in the soul, in disposing her for the divine union by purity and by the lights He gives her. The same wisdom that purifies the blessed spirits and illumines them in glory, also purifies the soul and enlightens her in this state.

3. "If anyone ask, why the soul gives the name of obscure night to the divine light which dissipates her ignorance, we reply that this divine wisdom is not only the night of the soul, but also her punishment, and this for two reasons: The first is the very excellence of the divine wisdom, which so surpasses the capacity of the soul that it plunges her into profound darkness. The second is the baseness and impurity of the soul, a thing that renders this light painful, sorrowful, and obscure. To understand the first reason we must presuppose this maxim of philosophy, that the more divine things are clear and manifest in themselves, the more are they obscure and hidden to the soul. It is the same with natural light: the more vivid and brilliant it is, the more it

dazzles and blinds the owl; the more fixedly one looks at the sun, the more its splendors fatigue the eye and envelop it in darkness, because of the excess of light and the weakness of the sight. Thus, when the divine light of this contemplation enters into a soul still incapable of supporting it, it spreads spiritual darkness over her.

"Obscure contemplation is thus painful to the soul in the beginning; for if this contemplation carries with it great goods, the soul that receives them, not being yet purified, is filled with innumerable miseries. As a result, she endures violent pains. In fact, two contrary things cannot subsist in the same subject. Now, it is this that takes place in the soul when the contest is waged between the goods of contemplation and the imperfections which contemplation labors to dispel. This is easily proved. As to the former point, it is manifest that this wisdom of contemplation, which seeks to penetrate the soul, has lights, splendors so vivid and pure, that the soul in which obscurity and impurity reign, experiences from them real sufferings: just as weak eyes suddenly stricken with a brilliant light feel from it a lively pain. In her state of imperfection the soul endures an analogous suffering, and she feels it the more as the light penetrates the more: for she sees herself so impure and miserable that she believes that God rises up against her, and that she herself rises up against God. It is a sense scarcely bearable. . . . That which increases the more her torment is the fear of never again finding grace before God, and of having no longer any good to hope for. Her spirit is entirely plunged into the knowledge of her miseries and evils. This divine light, although obscure, makes them known to her distinctly, and persuades her that of herself she cannot expect anything else.

4. "In the second place, the source of the torments that the soul suffers in this state is her natural and spiritual infirmity. This divine contemplation is imparted to her in a manner so strong and impetuous, with the design of strengthening her by destroying it, that she in her weakness cannot bear it, and seems to faint, principally when the vehemence of the light is exercised with more intensity. The senses and the spirit then suffer as if they were oppressed with an immense and invisible weight, and she falls into an agony so cruel that, if she had the choice, she would prefer

death and would welcome it as a real relief. . . .

"A marvellous thing and worthy of compassion; the soul has such weakness and imperfection in this state that the hand of God, so sweet and light of itself, appears to her hard and heavy; in reality, God touches the soul very delicately, since He treats her in this way only to enrich her with His gifts, and not to chastise her."

This masterly exposition of St. John of the Cross is in entire agreement with the doctrine of St. Thomas. According to the Angelic Doctor, God manifests to us the truth in two ways: by causing to pass under our eyes effects which lead us to the knowledge of the divine attributes, wisdom, power, etc., or, it may be, by penetrating us interiorly with His divine light. This second manifestation takes place in the passive purification of the spirit. It is a vivid and penetrating light, which shows to the soul all her miseries, even to her lightest imperfections. Such is the cause of the immense affliction with which the soul is flooded.

5. The passive purification of the spirit is much more terrible and painful than the passive purification of the senses. This is easily

explained. The passive purification of the spirit has for its end to subject the reason to God; the passive purification of the senses, to subject the sensitive appetite to reason. Now the distance between God and the creature is incomparably greater than that between the superior and the inferior parts of the soul. The labor and pain, therefore, are without comparison more considerable. To form a just idea of those interior torments, we must give the words of those who have experienced them.

"O Eternal Wisdom," cries out Blessed Henry Suso, "You are so sweet and amiable; how can You be so severe and terrible? Whence comes this light that pleases and terrifies? When I see the rigors of Your justice, I tremble in all my members, for You exercise in secret Your justice even with Your most cherished friends."

"A certain humility and a certain pride," says Blessed Angela of Foligno, "unceasingly contend in my soul—a thing that causes me very great sorrow: humility, because I see myself destitute of every good thing, destitute of every virtue and grace, and filled with a multitude of vices and wants which take from me all hope and hide from me all virtue. I consider myself, then, as the house of the devil, his agent, dupe and daughter, removed from all rectitude and veracity, worthy of the lowest depth of hell. In my soul and body I see only defects. God is closed and hidden from me. His remembrance even is forbidden me. . . . I see for my salvation neither door nor window. There is no remedy for so many evils, and I measure the depth of the abyss where I am entombed. It is that humility has swallowed me up as an ocean without shore. I contemplate in the abyss the superabundance of my miseries and iniquities."

We could cite many other like testimonies; let it suffice to quote here a passage from Tauler: "Persons the most spiritual," says he, "souls arrived at a very high contemplation, sometimes feel themselves laden with so great a poverty that there is no death of the body, however rough and cruel it might be, that they would not suffer willingly, if it were the good pleasure of God, in order to be delivered from this indigence, where they find themselves denuded of all spiritual consolation. In fact, this interior affliction is an evil that penetrates to the very marrow of the bones. It torments so much the more those who are laden with it, that, like persons parched with grief on a scaffold, they are constrained to suffer the agonies of death without being able to die, and without any creatures being able to console them. . . . They remain, so to speak, stifled and without respiration. . . . Creatures are more capable of augmenting their grief than of softening it. For it is not a small punishment to a generous spirit when it considers what is befitting the nobility of its nature, and to what the inclination of grace leads it, to be obliged to remain in commerce with creatures. . . . God acts thus with the elect, whom He loves. . . . He leaves them often in such extreme indigence and in so great interior dryness, that they believe themselves entirely deprived of grace, faith, charity, and of all sorts of goods."

TENTH CONFERENCE

The Passive Purification of the Spirit (II)

1. We have studied many things pertaining to this great subject of the passive purification of the spirit. Now the question comes: Is the passive purification of the spirit necessary in order to arrive at a high contemplation?

There can be no doubt about it. The passive purification of the senses suffices in order to arrive at the inferior degrees of infused contemplation, but when God calls a soul to the prayer of union, there is need of a purifying action more seaching and profound. St. John of the Cross explains the motives which render the purification of the spirit necessary.

"The soul," he says, "is not yet entirely purified; she must pass by the purification of the spirit, without which the purification of the senses, no matter how violent it may have been, will never be complete, because of the strict connection that exists between the superior and the inferior parts. . . . The two parts of the soul, the spiritual and the sensitive, must be completely purified. The purification of the senses is not entire if that of the spirit has not at least commenced. This is why the night of the senses should be called the reformation and moderation of the passions, rather than a purification, properly so called. The reason is that the imperfections and disorders of the sensitive part have their root and source in the spirit. In order to arrive at a complete purification, therefore, we must reach even to the spirit and there destroy the root of those bad habits and revolts. . . . The spirit must be simple, pure, and despoiled of all natural affection, actual as well as habitual, if it wishes to have the liberty and power to participate in the fullness of the divine wisdom. . . . This is easy to comprehend. The knowledge and the affections of the spirit purified and raised to perfection are of a rank far superior to the natural knowledge and affections. They are supernatural and divine. In order to fulfill the acts and to acquire the habits of the ones, it is absolutely necessary to cause the others to disappear. . . . When, as a result of the momentary darknesses of obscure contemplation, the understanding is perfectly purified, its natural light will give place to the splendors of the celestial light, and it will become all divine in the state of perfection. . . . We ought to say the same of the will. The love which is the fruit of the union is divine. By consequence, it is extremely spiritual, subtle, delicate, intimate; it surpasses all the natural sentiments and all the imperfect affections of the will. The memory also must be despoiled of all that was for it a subject of repose and agreement, in such sort that, by a manner of seeing all anew, the things of the past take on a changed aspect. By this means the obscure night will draw the spirit from the ordinary and common sentiment, to substitute for it a sentiment all divine.

2. Before arriving at the different degrees of the prayer of union, the soul must fulfill two conditions. The first consists in withdrawing herself from exterior and sensible things, in order to enter into possession of herself by submission. This is the proper of the passive purification of the senses. In the second place, the soul recollected in God must blot out as much as possible the multitude of thoughts, and allow the divine light to act in the passive purification of the spirit. Then the soul, raised

above the ordinary manner of knowing and acting, arrives at a uniformity of contemplation natural to the angels; that is to say, at the highest contemplation. The two conditions of which we have spoken are also to a certain point necessary in the inferior degrees of contemplation: they are ordinarily indispensable to arrive at the prayer of union.

3. It will be asked: How can it be known that the trials of the superior part of the soul are true passive purifications?

It is not always easy to find out the source of those trials, and to know whether they are the result of a merciful design of the divine goodness, or a punishment for a certain secret sin, newly committed. The incertitude concerning the true cause of those interior pains is for the soul a subject of trouble and chagrin. She would rejoice if she could know that all this comes from God, in view of preparing her for the divine union; but she is afflicted because she fears it is only a punishment for her sins.

We shall here give, after Father Thomas of Valgornera, some signs by which we may know whether or not those trials are true passive purifications. These signs can be reduced to three. The first sign appears when, on the one hand, the soul has no consciousness of any sin recently committed or of any grave imperfection; and on the other, having tasted the abundance of spiritual delights and sweetnesses, she sees herself suddenly in an abyss of agonies, aridities, and darknesses, and, so to say, buried in the shadows of death, in the horrors and pains of purgatory and hell. Although this tried soul may not recognize the benefit of purification *simple* and *pure,* she can do so with the help of a wise and experienced director, of whom she has very great need; for the director will say to her with authority that no one can be lost or commit sin without knowing and willing it. She will then have confidence in God, and will believe that she is not soiled with any sin, since she has no consciousness of having committed any.

4. The second sign is manifest when the soul refrains for a long time from all fully deliberate sin, even from the slightest faults; and when she has no longer any inclination for exterior and perishable things, but solely a continual view of her miseries and a fully supernatural grief for them, coupled with an ardent desire of perfection. To refrain for a long

time from all fully deliberate sins is a proof that one lives in the grace and friendship of God; for, according to St. Thomas, it is morally impossible, when one is not sustained by grace and charity, to remain for a long time without falling into some sin; because, on the one hand, the soul is not well disposed to receive the graces of God, and, on the other, the sin which has preceded has opened a passage for others. For the rest, if the soul had sinned, she would feel some inclination for exterior things. Finally, if the soul feels what is said above, that is to say, a view of her miseries full of supernatural grief, and an ardent desire of perfection, it is a proof that the purification of the saints, not that of sinners, is operated in her.

The third sign consists in very easy and frequent contemplation and in a very pure and sovereign love of God. In the midst of the darkness of the passive purification of the spirit, the soul contemplates God in a general and confused manner, and burns with the fire—ardent, though painful—of divine charity. These two interior dispositions prove clearly that the soul does not undergo the pain of any disordered affection; for if it were so, she would not persevere in the thought and love of God and in the contempt and hatred of herself in the midst of afflictions and darkness. Although in the commencement of the passive purification of the spirit the love of God is scarcely sensible, because of the obscurity and aridity, nevertheless, the soul that undergoes this trial would rather suffer the most cruel death than commit a light fault of deliberate purpose. Her greatest pain comes from this, that she fears to have offended God and to have lost His grace and friendship. She would make little of the torments she endures, if she felt she suffered them for God, and death itself would seem to her sweet and glorious, if she could at this price render some service to her Divine Master.

Such, according to Father Thomas of Valgornera, are the characters and signs of the passive purification of the spirit. This exposition embraces, it seems to us, all that mystic theology teaches upon this question.

ELEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Effects of the Passive Purification of the Spirit

1. We have studied what is the passive purification of the spirit. We have seen how terrible and dolorous that purification can be. We have learned how necessary this purification is in order to arrive at high contemplation, and how we can know that the trials of the superior part of the soul are true passive purifications. Let us now see what are its effects. These are of two sorts: the ones remove obstacles which oppose themselves to the union of divine transformation; the others set forth a great union with God.

St. John of the Cross explains this double result by a comparison. "This night," he says, "this loving knowledge, or this divine light, purifies the soul and disposes her for a perfect union in the same manner as fire transforms the wood that it consumes. At first the fire drives out the humidity of the wood and dries it. Afterwards it blackens it, soils it with vapors and smoke in consuming all that is contrary and gross. It prepares it thus for combustion. After a while it warms it, inflames it exteriorly. Finally, it transforms it and renders it luminous and brilliant in itself. In this state the wood has no longer its own proper action. Its action and properties become those of the fire, with the exception of quantity and weight. The wood is then clothed with all the qualities of its conqueror: it is dry, and it dries; it is hot, and it warms; it is luminous, and it gives light; finally, it acquires a lightness that it had not before, and thus participates in all the qualities of fire. Let us apply this comparison to the fire of obscure contemplation and divine love. Before uniting itself to the soul and transforming her, it despoils her of all that could resist its action: it releases her from the weight of all her imperfections; it renders her black and obscure—a thing that makes her appear in her own eyes more wicked than before. In fact, her defects, which were hidden and unknown to her, are now exposed before her eyes. The fire of purification stirs them so as to expel and destroy them. After that it commences to shed over the soul the light of its rays, even to this extent that, having filled her with light and heat, it transforms her and imparts to her the perfect union of divine love."

The application which St. John of the Cross makes here, that, namely, of the action of fire to the passive purification of the spirit, is as pious as it is solid. This symbolism had not escaped St. Thomas, who speaks of it many times in his writings in explaining the *purifying and transforming* action of God in souls. The divine light of this obscure night is in fact a supernatural fire which purifies and prepares for the divine splendors; it is a true anticipated Purgatory.

2. Let us see now what, according to St. John of the Cross, are the effects of the passive purification of the spirit from the point of view of the removal of obstacles. "The powers of the soul," he says, "are now suppressed and weakened and have no longer any motion or support. The imagination is bound and cannot help to form any *intelligible image* (*species intelligibilis*) to aid the reasoning power. The memory appears extinct and remembers nothing. The understanding is filled with darkness and is void of knowledge. The will is arid,

closed on all sides, without force, as if dead. In a word, all the faculties seem suspended. A thick cloud spreads over the soul, surrounds her, overwhelms her, and seems to separate her entirely from God. Meanwhile, the soul pursues her way in obscurity, yet full of assurance. The reason is simple. She is now set free from the obstacles of her senses and powers. In fact, it is ordinarily our appetites, our attractions, our reasonings, our knowledge, our affections that draw us to excesses on the one side or the other, that expose us to changes, and cause us to fall into a thousand extravagances. From the time that the soul is delivered from herself and her unruly operations, she escapes from her other enemies, the world and the devil, who remain disarmed and no longer have a passage to penetrate to her. It follows from this that, the more the soul advances in the midst of darkness and ceases her natural operations, the more she is in security.

"O spiritual souls! When you shall see your powers full of obscurity, your affections paralyzed and sterile, your faculties powerless for every exercise of the spirit, be not afflicted, but rather esteem those trials as a great good. God, in taking away from you your imperfect manner of acting, delivers you from yourselves. In spite of the good use you made before now of your faculties, their impurity and baseness had never permitted you to obtain a result so perfect, and a security so entire. God now takes you by the hand and makes Himself your conductor in the midst of darkness. He guides you as one blind, by an unknown way, where neither the vivacity of your eyes nor the firmness of your foot had ever been able to conduct you."

3. As to the effects of the passive purification of the spirit in the point of view of spiritual helps, it produces in the soul effects of the same nature as those of the passive purification of the senses, but in a superior degree. The knowledge of God and of ourselves arrives at its greatest perfection, and the virtues become truly heroic. It procures for us, I say, a superior knowledge of God and of ourselves.

The soul necessarily finds in the passive purification of the spirit a perfect knowledge of herself, since the principle and formal cause of this contemplation is a vivid and sparkling light which penetrates to the very depth of the soul and shows her all her miseries. Now, if we are enlightened as to ourselves with so much force and perfection by this supernatural light, we cannot fail to be enlightened at the same time upon God and His infinite perfections. Indeed, the soul, despoiled of all things and of herself, turns towards God as towards her center, and God on His part, seeing this void in the soul, sheds upon her a very perfect knowledge of His Divine Majesty.

"Oh, what delicious fruits come from this profound gulf," cries out Tauler. "The purified heart plunges into it at all times with the sentiment of divine love and of the infinite distance that separates it from God. How sweet is it to lose oneself thus in the divine abyss, confessing one's misery, when one is exercised beforehand in virtue and has made every effort to purify in himself the spirit and the body. When nature has done her work and when she has arrived at a point where she can no longer rise higher, God comes to her assistance. From the depth of His Divinity He causes to spring up divine sparks in the spirit of the justified man, who, aided by the supernatural power of grace, arrives at this happy state where he has no longer only God in view.

The eternal abyss of the Divinity with all its immensity can alone produce and accomplish those effects."

4. The same passive purification of the spirit raises the soul to the practice of the most sublime virtues. This is done through a special motion of the Holy Ghost, and St. Thomas calls the virtues so practised the virtues of *a purified heart*. In this state prudence looks no longer to any but celestial things; temperance no longer covets earthly things; fortitude ignores the passions; and justice attaches itself by a perpetual alliance to the infinite intelligence. These virtues are the heritage of the blessed in Heaven and the most perfect men on earth. It is the same for the theological virtues: faith, hope, charity are raised far above ordinary proportions, and show to our astonished gaze a spectacle truly worthy of Heaven.

We can say that the virtues practised in this state are the eminent virtues that St. John of the Cross, following St. Bernard and St. Thomas, places among the highest degrees of divine love. "In the sixth degree, the soul runs towards God at a more rapid and lighter pace; her hope, sustained on the wings of love, knows no longer faintings. . . . In the seventh degree, the soul is filled with a holy daring; she no longer eagerly awaits the deliberation of judgment in order to act. She no longer asks for counsel from prudence in order to moderate herself. A vain modesty is no longer capable of restraining her, because the favors with which God loads her make her act with an intrepid boldness. . . . This liberty, this courage, which the soul receives from God, disposes her for the eighth degree, where the joy of possessing her Beloved and of uniting herself to Him awaits her. . . . Arrived at the ninth degree, the soul feels herself burning with a delicious ardor. This degree is reserved for perfect souls who consume themselves sweetly for God, and in which this suavity and ardor are maintained directly by the Holy Ghost by reason of their intimate union with God." "It is to this height of sanctity that grace can raise a soul," says Massoulié. "Then man receives an entire conversion. The soul becomes all ardent for the things of Heaven and insensible to the things of earth. It receives a likeness to God as perfect as one can have it in this life."

TWELFTH CONFERENCE

The Trials that Most Frequently Accompany the Passive Purification of the Spirit

I

1. It will console and benefit many grieved souls to know what are the trials that most frequently accompany the passive purification of the spirit, and how to meet and combat them.

These trials are ordinarily, (1) temptations against faith, (2) the fear of being damned, (3) the privation of the most legitimate consolations, (4) a lively and most profound sense of abandonment and of the anger of God, (5) scruples, and (6) temptations to blasphemy.

These different trials do not pertain so properly to the passive purification of the spirit that one cannot find them in much less perfect states. But there they have no longer the same character or the same end; much less profound and painful, they are not sent in view of the prayer of union.

As to the temptations against faith, they are all the inspirations of the devil. They raise a thousand objections and difficulties against the mysteries of faith, and God permits them to complete the purification of His elect. In particular they suggest this thought: how they would be deceived if what they believed were not true, since, after having been very miserable and deprived of all comforts in this world, they would have no recompense in the other.

Blessed Henry Suso for ten years had to undergo such a temptation against the faith: the more he tried to combat it, the more was he tormented by it.

How then are we to resist those temptations against faith? We must, in the first place, lift our heart to God and ask for His grace: "Lord, strengthen and increase my faith!" We can afterwards resist the devil, saying to him: "How dare you tempt me thus, since you yourself are obliged to believe, and that is the cause of your gnashing of teeth?" But the essential thing is to multiply acts of faith on the truth attacked by the devil.

2. Another temptation which sometimes accompanies the passive purification of the spirit is the fear of being damned. To give you a just

idea of this trial, we must listen to the groans of those who have endured it. Blessed Henry Suso thus explains this temptation. "Unhappy one," the devil cried to him, "what does it benefit you what you do for Heaven, since you are already cursed, and you shall be damned? How do you wish to fight against a decree of the Almighty? Why do you try to redeem yourself from hell?" Then Blessed Henry, laden under the weight of his sorrows, cried: "Unhappy one that I am, what shall I do, or where shall I find refuge? O my God! my God! was there ever creature more to be pitied than I? Why was I born, if I must be always unhappy—unhappy in time and unhappy in eternity?"

But nothing equals, it seems to me, the torments of Blessed Angela of Foligno. "How many the torments of my soul!" she says. "The devil inflicts them on me almost continually. I cannot better compare myself than to a man hung by the neck, who, his hands bound behind his back and his eyes bandaged, would remain tied by a cord to a gibbet and would live there without help, without remedy, without support. I believe that what I suffer at the hands of the devils is even more cruel and desperate, for I see that the devils have hung my soul, and just as the hanged one has no support, so my soul is suspended and my powers are overthrown in the sight and knowledge of my spirit. When my soul sees this total overthrow and abandonment of her faculties, without power to fight against it, there is in me such a straining that it is with difficulty I sometimes weep, so much is my grief filled with rage and despair. At times I weep, but without relief! At other times my grief is such that I can scarcely help cutting myself into pieces. I cannot prevent myself from striking myself horribly, to the point of inflaming my head and members. When my soul assists at the ruin and abandonment of my powers, grief is begotten in her, and I cry to God unceasingly: 'My God, my God, do not abandon me!' "

St. John of the Cross, therefore, had reason to say: "The greatest punishment of the soul is to believe that God hates her, abandons her, and leaves her in darkness. . . . She seems to share in all the agonies and dolors of hell, because she feels herself deprived of God, chastised and repulsed by Him. She imagines herself to carry all the weight of His anger. She fears even with much of appearance according to her sentiment that He will treat her eternally with the same severity."

3. In the face of such torments, at the fear of being damned, the soul has need of being helped and encouraged by reassuring thoughts and considerations. This is the time to meditate on the mercy of God, who is always ready to pardon as long as we are in this world. The soul tempted to despair will recall the titles that God has willed to take and which express to us realities full of hope: God is just without doubt, but He is a Father, a Saviour, a friend; and, then, have we not reason to hope at seeing the numerous examples of those who have come out of the abyss to become vessels of election and models of all virtues—St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Augustine, and so many others? At the same time, and during the fearful period that she is tempted by thoughts of her reprobation, the soul will continue in the practice of perfect resignation to the will of God. This is a very salutary and meritorious exercise, provided it is maintained within just bounds.

"The perfection of a soul," says Massoulié, "consists in the conformity of her will to the most holy and adorable will of God, and we can judge of the degree of holiness she has attained by the degree of this conformity. When the conformity is perfect, it brings about a transformation of the will, which we can call the summit of perfection. Then God reigns in man, and man, so to speak, ceases to be in himself in order to be wholly in God. He brings about a union, or, as a Father of the Church says, a unity of spirit, and the man becomes in an ineffable and incomprehensible manner, not God, *but a man of God, i. e.,* he becomes by grace what God is by nature. And thus 'the man is become one spirit with God,' not only by this unity of will which causes him to will all that God wills, but still more by a more express unity which prevents him from willing any other thing than what God wills. Attachment to the will of God produces perfect resignation to all the things that God permits in us or against us: in poverty and abundance, in affliction and consolation, the heart is always prompt to receive all. Let one be despoiled of earthly goods; let him be abandoned by his friends; let him have neither vigor nor health; and let him be exposed to all the disgraces of the world: all is indifferent to a truly resigned soul because she looks solely on the will of God and considers all the rest as nothing, the possession of which is not capable of conferring happiness, and the loss of which cannot make her unhappy. God alone suffices because God alone contains all good things. With God one has everything and without Him, even though one may have all, he has nothing.

4. "But this indifference ought not to extend to the possession of God. . . . If it happens that thoughts of this kind present themselves to our spirit: 'What ought I to do if God, to exercise His justice, willed to cast me into hell?' Very far from remaining indifferent we must then excite our confidence and love towards Him and say with all the humility we are capable of: 'O Lord, I will unite myself so closely, so continually, so faithfully to You, that it will be necessary to draw me with You into Heaven, or to descend with me into hell.' A soul truly enlightened and directed by pious and learned servants of God, will never have any other sentiments. It is true that souls are sometimes found who, by a pious transport wishing to testify to God the purity of their love, say to Him that they wish to love Him solely for Himself, even if He should never give them any recompense, and if there were

neither paradise nor hell, and that even if He wished to cast them into hell, they would never cease to love Him because they love Him and wish to love Him only for His own sake. But these are, to tell the truth, only the transports of a soul that regards the glory and the delights of paradise as something that is outside of God. It is quite different when there is question of actually losing God. 'What have I in heaven but Thee?' says David, 'and what do I desire upon earth if not Thee? For Thee my flesh and my heart have fainted away. Thou art the God of my heart and the God that art my portion for ever.' (Ps. lxxii, 25–26.) Behold what are the tender and perpetual sentiments of a holy soul: independence, indifference, contempt, forgetfulness for all that is outside of God; but attachment without relaxation, ardent love, violent transports for God. The soul that loves God with a chaste love demands no other recompense from God than Himself, and demanding nothing from Him, she wishes to rejoice in Him because it is absolutely impossible that the soul desires not, hopes not, demands not with all her powers, to possess the Object whom she loves. . . . Let God caress this soul; let Him withdraw Himself sometimes from her; let Him leave her languid during His absence; let Him give her suffering; let Him humble her; let Him seem to repulse her: she bears with it; she is consoled at it; for she knows that those are the trials or the dissimulations of His love. Meanwhile, she cannot prevent herself from desiring Him, from sighing for Him, and whilst she loves Him, she will say to Him often with the Psalmist: 'O my God, Thou art the God of my heart, and my portion forever!' "

II

1. It might be asked: Why does God sometimes permit the soul to be deprived of the most lawful consolations? It is to complete her purification. In this trial the agonizing soul does not find support anywhere. On the side of God, it seems that she has lost all: on the side of creatures, nothing is capable of comforting her. All the counsels that one gives her, all the spiritual books, all the directors whom she consults, bring her no succor. In vain does one propose to her the most powerful motives of consolation by assuring her that there will result very great benefits from those pains; she can-

not believe it. She is so drenched with bitterness and so submerged in an ocean of evil that she imagines herself to be misunderstood by those who speak to her. And in fact they cannot say to her what she needs, nor suggest to her the necessary remedies. Thus those conversations, far from consoling her, increase her grief. She will then have no means of softening her agonies till our Lord completes her purification after the manner and in the time that it shall please Him.

2. Another question is: In what consists the lively and profound sense of abandonment and of the anger of God that sometimes accompanies the passive purification of the spirit?

It is a sort of despair which comes from the certitude that one believes to have of his reprobation. Up to this there remained in the depth of the soul some hope of a remedy; now the temptation is stronger and takes unheard of proportions. Listen to Blessed Angela of Foligno: "I have never suffered a like despair," she says. "I totally despair in God and in His graces. All is ended between Him and me. I am certain that there is not in the whole world a soul more filled with crimes and more worthy of hell than I, because God has permitted His favors and gifts to end only in increasing my despair and reprobation."

3. Another trial of the passive purification are scruples. The passive trial of scruples, of which there is question here, is not a simple malady of the soul, such as happens very often to those who are beginners; it is a violent temptation of the devil which tortures those who are thus purified beyond all that can be imagined. "Those souls," says St. John of the Cross, "are seized by the *'spirit of giddiness,'* which obscures their judgment and fills it with a thousand scruples and perplexities, so that they can find satisfaction in nothing, nor lean on the counsels and sentiment of anyone. This trial is one of the most terrible and frightful of the spiritual night."

4. The spirit of blasphemy also sometimes accompanies the passive purification of the spirit. This is a diabolical vexation which God permits to complete the purification of the soul by humiliation. "Souls are then assailed by the spirit of blasphemy. All their thoughts are harassed by frightful blasphemies, suggested so vividly to the imagination that sometimes the mouth seems to utter them, and this is

for them an unspeakable torment." This is easily understood. Blasphemy is the greatest of sins, since it carries with it all the gravity of a sin of infidelity, and since one can say that it is the sin of the damned. Now behold how a soul closely united to God by charity sets herself to turn into derision all she sees or hears most holy and sacred—and this not only within herself, but exteriorly also. What profound humiliation! What horrible torment! Oh, it is then that the soul has need of patience and humility. She ought to strengthen herself in the battle by frequent thoughts of faith and hope, and unceasingly repeat that she would choose to die rather than give ear to those diabolical suggestions.

It is hard to account for the violence of the different temptations of which we have spoken. They are generally explained by the high end to which souls who undergo them are called, and by the diabolic action which God permits in order to purify those souls by suffering. In what concerns diabolic action, it appears manifest in the most extraordinary temptations. We can apply to them what we have said of obsessions, for we discover here all the marks of them. If there is not true obsession, we can explain these phenomena by the trouble and agitation of the inferior part of the soul.

5. Side by side with these there are delicious dolors, destined to prepare the soul for the perfect and consummate union. Before arriving at the most elevated summits of contemplation, the soul has to undergo a last purification, which is called the purification of love. After the example of ancient authors we shall not speak of it here, because this purifying love is directly related to the last degree but one of infused contemplation, of which it is one of the principal effects. It is, then, to this part of our work that we direct the reader.

THIRTEENTH CONFERENCE

The More Dangerous Trials that Ordinarily Accompany the Passive Purification of the Senses and of the Spirit

I

1. In past conferences we described some of the secondary trials that accompany the passive purification of the senses and of the spirit. Let us to-day treat of the principal and more dangerous trials, the ones that can bring about disastrous effects.

We can reduce all the trials that present themselves on the occasion of passive purifications to two principal ones, around which all the others are grouped: namely, the temptation to get discouraged, and the temptation to murmur. The temptation to become discouraged accompanies more particularly those who pass through the passive purification of the senses, while the temptation to murmur is possible in all degrees of passive trials. Those two temptations, it is true, can be met with in all interior souls, even in those who are not called to such extraordinary pains. Nevertheless, one is more exposed to them in the midst of the agonies of passive purifications. It is, therefore, very important to fortify oneself against this danger, which paralyzes the excellent effects God purposes to obtain in thus trying His faithful servants, and for this reason I will enumerate those trials individually.

The first degree of the temptation of discouragement consists in the thought to abandon the way of perfection altogether through the fear of not succeeding.

To fight against this temptation there is need of magnanimous hearts. In fact, the pusillanimous shun great enterprises because they have always a fear of undertaking things above their strength and seemingly impossible to realize. "This temptation [the fear of not succeeding] is precious for him who acts courageously," says St. Catherine of Siena. "He believes himself unworthy of the peace, repose, and consolations which other servants of God receive. He believes that he deserves to suffer and rejoices in the midst of his pains. He blesses God in every circumstance. But for him who loves himself, this temptation, which is good in itself, becomes dangerous through defect of light and dispositions."

The second degree of the temptation of discouragement consists in withdrawing from the way of perfection through fear of the difficulties one must overcome to surmount them. If the soul has not energetically resisted the first temptation, she must expect discouragement in this second assault. To succumb to the fear of which we here speak is cowardice, a sentiment unworthy of a generous heart.

The third degree of the temptation of discouragement is *ennui* and disgust. Pusillanimity and fear are accompanied with a profound sadness, which descends on the soul and afflicts her in such sort that she has no longer courage to set herself to work; a sort of torpor and sleepiness preventing her from doing good.

The fourth degree of the temptation of discouragement is, so to speak, a necessary consequence of pusillanimity, fear, and disgust. The soul is tempted to abandon completely the way of perfection.

The fifth degree of the temptation of discouragement consists in a trouble which upsets the mind and inclines it to take a course contrary to virtue. "The soul in her affliction," it is said in the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena, "ought not to abandon her pious exercises and allow herself by ignorance to fall into sadness of heart and become prey to an *ennui* which upsets the mind; this would be to expose oneself to great danger and to find death where I have placed life."

2. As to the temptation to murmur, the first degree urges and excites the subject to complain of the number and rigor of the trials. It is permissible to address to God filial and resigned complaints when our trials seem to exceed our strength; but it is always on condition that one commences by accepting and bearing them as long as possible. We can then say with holy Job in a spirit of perfect submission and resignation: "What is my strength, that I can hold out? Or what is my end that I can keep patience? My strength is not the strength of stones, nor is my flesh of brass. Behold there is no help for me in myself, and my familiar friends are also departed from me." (Job vi, 11–13). Job contents himself with making known his sad state and the extent of his suffering; he is despoiled of all and without human hope of regaining what has been taken

from him. His complaint is resigned and has nothing improper in it.

The second degree of the temptation to murmur does not content itself with showing and enlarging the trials in themselves; it addresses itself directly to God, as if He were unjust. Job makes known this temptation in the following words: "Would to God that my sins whereby I have deserved wrath, and the calamity that I suffer, were weighed in a balance; as the sand of the sea this would appear heavier. This is why my words are full of sorrow. For the arrows of the Lord are in me, the rage whereof drinketh up my spirit, and the terrors of the Lord war against me." (Job vi, 2–4). It is thus that a soul troubled with temptation speaks: "I am not so guilty as that God should unchain in this manner His anger against me. He has not preserved the balance of His justice, for though I have sinned, I have not deserved this deluge of evils."

Perfect souls enlightened on the value of sufferings resist this temptation promptly. They see in those tribulations, excessive to the eyes of nature, a necessary and merciful purgatory, which has for its end to unite them more quickly and completely to the Sovereign Good.

The third degree of the temptation to murmur urges us to doubt the Providence of God, and by consequence, God Himself. It is the blasphemy which Eliphaz falsely imputes to Job. "Dost not thou think that God is higher than heaven, and is elevated above the height of the stars, and thou sayest, 'What doth God know? and He judgeth as it were through a mist. The clouds are His covert, and He doth not consider what passeth among us.'" (Job xxii, 12–14). It seems to those afflicted souls that God is asleep, whilst, on the contrary, His Providence has never watched over them with greater care.

3. We may be permitted to ask: Why does God allow the temptations of discouragement and murmuring?

He has a double end in view in permitting those temptations: to purify us more and more, and to cause us to advance in the virtue of patience—the true touchstone of perfect souls.

I say, patience is the true touchstone of perfect souls. It sanctifies and supernaturalizes all our sufferings and renders our virtues perfect. "All the virtues," it is said in the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena, "may deceive for a time, and can make us believe that they are perfect, when in reality they are not. But they cannot hide themselves before thee, O Patience, because thou art the mirror of the soul; thou art the essence of charity, and thou showest whether the virtues are living and perfect. From the fact that thou art absent, we see that all the virtues are imperfect, and that they are not yet nourished at the table of the holy Cross." Divine Wisdom adds in another place: "The pith of the tree," that is to say, of charity in the soul, "is patience, which proves that I am in the soul and the soul is in Me."

It would be a very great evil not to suffer the trials of the passive purification with patience. God, seeing our lack of generosity, withdraws from us the choicest graces that He in His mercy had prepared for us. We should deserve the reproaches that the Lord addresses to pusillanimous souls through St. Catherine of Siena: "Unhappy one! thou oughtest to embrace the cross, and thou fliest from it. . . . Thou oughtest to be firm and unshakable in the way of My Truth, giving up to it thy heart and thy mind, and thou floatest about like the leaf carried by the wind. Thou goest according to the will of time; prosperity agitateth thee with an unruly joy; adversity throweth thee into impatience; thou showest thy pride by impatience; for as patience is the essence of charity, impatience is that of pride." Those words show us how essential it is to fight with energy and perseverance against the temptations of discouragement and murmuring. Without these we shall never receive the infinitely precious graces that God destines for us in the heights of contemplation.

II

1. What, then, are the principal safeguards against these temptations? The faithful soul resists temptations by employing the arms of the spiritual warfare. "Of all things," says Tauler, "the most necessary to man is to learn to fight and combat always. . . . Many, after having made great progress in virtue, lost themselves solely because they did not know the art of fighting and combating. Many, after having done great things for forty or fifty years, cannot sustain the temptations and trials that rush on them as a violent tempest. They fall, and their life is reduced to nothing! Their virtues and practices, so admired, have not kept them from a shameful fall. It is above all in temptation and suffering that one learns

to know his soul. Oh! how precious and useful are temptations to one who bears them as he ought, and who keeps himself on his guard! They are as advantageous as virtue. It is in temptation that virtue is born, becomes perfect and fruitful.

"It is necessary that we be tempted, in order that virtue may become a habit in us. . . . God can give Himself to us by the most painful temptations as well as by the sweetness of the virtues. . . . Take up, then, the holy armor of God! You will without any doubt overcome all your temptations, and you will become meek and humble. He who is clothed with this armor, cannot be overcome here below, either by the devil or by men and all creatures conspired against him; but he who has not those arms, will certainly be overcome by temptation. Meekness is opposed to anger, which has its source in self-love; and humility is opposed to pride, which is only a secret complaisance in oneself. With this double armor we shall overcome all trials and temptations. They will be no longer anything for you; or, rather, it will be for you a joy and a true happiness to suffer them for the love of God. . . .

"A man ought then to bear before him, and to hold firm the shield of faith. Let him not lay aside this shield, and let him receive on it the darts of the enemy; let him put on his head the helmet of confidence and salvation; let him gird himself with the justice of God, and, thus armed, let him courageously face the blows, the skill, and all the malice of his enemies, so that he may preserve himself in perfection when the evil days of temptation shall come for him."

2. Among all the interior dispositions recommended in order to resist the temptations of discouragement and murmuring, there is one which succeeds infallibly when one gives it full and entire liberty to develop; we wish to speak of perfect conformity to the will of God.

To arrive at this perfect conformity, we must believe firmly in the beneficent action of Divine Providence. The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena furnishes us with admirable instructions on this subject. "Thou knowest," it is there said, "that My Providence watcheth thus over the perfect in order to prove and to increase in them their perfection. For in this life no one is so perfect that he cannot become more so. . . . Tribulation is the sign which proves that charity is perfect in a soul that knows how to suffer with a sweet patience. The tribulations and injuries that I permit exercise the patience of my servants. . . . Their virtue is nourished with all that I permit as with all that I accord to them. . . . The more they thus abandon themselves, the more they find themselves with advantage in Me. Where do they seek Me? In truth, by following with perfection the way that My Word Incarnate has traced out for them. They have read His sweet and glorious book. They have seen there that in willing to obey Me, to show how He loved My honor and how He desired the salvation of the human race, My Son walked in the midst of pains and reproaches to the table of the most holy Cross, where He partook of the bitter nourishment of the human race. I try my servants with tribulations during this life, in order that they may bear more abundant and delicious fruits before Me, and I rejoice at the perfumes of their patience and virtue. Oh, how agreeable and sweet are those fruits! What consolation and advantage does not the soul that suffers without offending Me draw from them! If one knew it, if one comprehended it, with what joy and ardor would he not have asked for trials in order to suffer! It is for him to procure this treasure so little known that My paternal Providence afflicts the soul with so many tribulations which prevent her patience from growing rusty and remaining idle."

3. Here is a passage on the same subject from Tauler, which mystic authors take pleasure in citing: "But if you feel agitated by some motion of impatience in adversities, resist with all your power and remain firm, even as Jesus Christ remained firm when He was so strongly laboring under the thought of the punishments He was about to endure. . . . It must needs be that His soul was powerfully tormented, since the sole thought of His Passion caused Him to fall into agony and to pour out a sweat of blood. When any affliction befalls you, mass all your powers as promptly as possible, and, sanctifying this suffering in its source, try to present it in spirit and offer it with humility to the Heavenly Father as a chosen and precious oblation, saying to Him: 'O Father, I receive this affliction from Your hand as the most dear and precious pledge of Your love! If it is necessary that I drink of the chalice of this passion, as a sufferer who is obliged to

drink a bitter cup in order to banish his malady, let Your will be done, and not mine! The sole thing that I earnestly ask of You, is that You be pleased to accord me the grace and strength to bear those sufferings conformably to the orders of Your will.' If you do this, be assured that the Eternal Father will keep His eyes open and come to succor you in due time, if you will only await it."

THIRD BOOK

INFUSED CONTEMPLATION GENERAL AND INDISTINCT

FIRST CONFERENCE

Infused Contemplation

I

1. To-day we enter on the study of an interesting and sublime subject that calls for the exercise of highest thought, and that sets forth the play of the divine gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge. I mean, dear Sisters, that which treats of the nature, principles, effects, and conditions of infused contemplation.

The privilege of infused contemplation is the highest vouchsafed by God to a soul in this world, and truly is, as it has been styled by the saints, a foretaste of the life of the Blessed.

As, in the order of inquiry, the nature of a thing comes first, it will be asked at the outset, What is infused contemplation?

To this let me reply that there are two sorts of infused contemplation—general and indistinct contemplation, which is contemplation properly so called; and particular and distinct contemplation, which is an extraordinary contemplation, of the order of graces called *gratis datae.*

These two contemplations are alike in many points; nevertheless, as they differ also in some others, we shall speak here *directly* only of general and indistinct contemplation, reserving to ourselves the privilege of treating more specially of particular and distinct contemplation later on.

We can define infused contemplation properly so called as a purely gratuitous gift of God, by which the just and purified soul, is raised, (a) more passively than actively, (b) above the ordinary manner of knowing, and (c) receives lights so abundant, pure, and vivid, that she is, so to speak, (d) introduced into a superior spiritual region, where she contemplates by a regard, (e) excessively simple and ardently tender, celestial and divine things.

Before commenting separately on the terms of this definition, let me say that the explanations we shall give of it in this conference and others that are to follow, the general effects of this infused contemplation, as well as the effects proper to each of its degrees, such as are expounded in many places of this work, suffice to make us distinguish infused contemplation from what is not infused; nevertheless, for greater clearness' sake, we shall indicate here three distinctive characters of infused contemplation which appear to us most important and most easy to grasp; this contemplation has something in it of the sudden, the passive, and the heroic.

(a) It is an instantaneous regard. The understanding and the will are drawn and, so to speak, carried away by an invisible and sovereign hand. (b) It is an elevation, which commences and ceases, not when we wish, but when God wills. (c) Finally, it is a divine fire, which consumes the soul with the purest flames of charity, and makes her produce fruits of salvation and sanctification which reach the heroic.

2. I have said that the soul in infused contemplation is raised to God *more passively than actively*. Properly speaking, there is no

contemplation, however elevated it may be, in which the soul ceases to act. Meanwhile, we must acknowledge that God in infused contemplation takes upon Himself a notable part of our intellectual operations, and that the gifts of the Holy Ghost, imparted in an eminent degree, impress on the soul a supernatural motion of great energy. Under this divine impulse the contemplative acts become excessively delicate, peaceful, and delicious; our faculties then appear *more passive than active.*

St. Thomas has not understood it otherwise. Commenting on the words of St. Paul to the Romans: "All they who are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God" (Rom. viii, 14), he says: "All that is put in motion by a superior impulse receives this motion without hesitation. This is why we say that animals are not active, but passive: they are driven by their instinct, not by a deliberate motion. It is this that takes place in the contemplative soul. The principal cause of her action is not in herself, but in the impulse and the motion that she receives from the Holy Ghost, according to the word of Isaias: 'He shall come as a violent storm which *the Spirit of the Lord driveth on'* (lix, 19), and that other word of St. Luke: 'Jesus was thrust by the Spirit into the desert' (iv, 1). The contemplative soul acts willfully and freely, although the Holy Ghost sets in motion her will and her free choice, according to those words of the Apostle (Phil. ii, 13): 'It is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will.' "

Elsewhere the holy Doctor expresses himself thus: "We must consider that if the power that is the principle of the action is set in motion by a superior power, the operation that proceeds from it is not solely an action, but also *a passion,* in as much as it comes from a power subject to a superior impulse."

In infused contemplation God is the principal agent: that is why the soul is *more passive than active.* "Then," says St. John of the Cross, "it is God who acts particularly in the soul; it is He who teaches her and who pours out in her those infused perceptions which she does nothing but receive. God imparts to her very spiritual gifts, which are at once her perception and her love."

3. I have said that, in infused contemplation, the soul *is raised above the ordinary manner of knowing.* How is this? It is for the rea-

son that in this contemplation the one and the other of the intellectual operations offer the character of an extraordinary intervention on the part of God.

May I be permitted, before entering on this matter, to sum up in few words the theory of intellectual perception? I will do this in the words of a modern writer, and I will ask my readers, before proceeding farther, to master this theory of the Scholastics, for it will turn up again and again in studying the science of mystic theology.

"Those who have read, however little it may be, the works of St. Thomas, Suarez, etc., know of what utility this theory is to the mystic to discern the diverse sorts of contemplations, visions and words, etc., whether intellectual, imaginative, or corporal; what light it throws on the nature of contemplation and intellectual perceptions. The short exposition we are about to give, therefore, finds its place here with so much the greater reason as it is one of the fundamental points of Scholastic philosophy.

"When we look upon an exterior object, *e. g.,* a house, a tree, etc., this object, illumined by a material light, does not unite itself immediately with our eyes, but solely by a quality or *accident* called *species impressa* (impressed figure). This figure, united to the sense, has the power of producing in concert with it an image or representation of the object, called *species expressa* (expressed figure). This first act of knowledge is called sensation. The interior senses (*i. e.,* the memory, the imagination, etc.) have as functions to receive and preserve the *figures* received by the exterior senses, and even to combine them and form of them new ones. These *species* or *sensible figures* are finally subjected to an intellectual operation which we call *abstraction.* The proper object of the human intellect is *the universal,* that is to say, the *whatness* or the nature of things.

"Suppose, then, that a sensible object is present to us, as each sense takes or *abstracts* from it the formal thing which is its object, and leaves untouched the other forms, objects of the other senses; so the intellect will abstract or apprehend from it the universal, that is to say, the element common to this and other individuals, without stopping to consider what is singular and proper to each individual, and what is the true object of the other faculties. Such is abstraction. The figures or *species* thus stripped by abstraction of what they have of matter, are called *species intelligibiles* (*concepts, ideas, or mental words*): *they fill together* with the intelligence (*intellectus possibilis*) the same rôle as do the *species sensibiles* (sensible figures) with the senses. They are, therefore, merely the determining principle, or to speak more accurately, the co-principle of intellectual knowledge. In fact, just as we have need of a material light in the act of sensible vision, so an intellectual light is necessary in intellectual vision. This light, which enables us to see the truth, is the *intellectus agens* or light of reason. The *species intelligibiles* are then *impressed* on the intellect (*intellectus possibilis*) and in concert with this faculty they *express* the intellectual concept or mental word (*species expressae*). This last act of perception is called *intellection.*"

St. Francis de Sales has not feared to reproduce this Scholastic theory of intellectual knowledge in his *Treatise on the Love of God.* "When we look on anything," he says, "however it may be presented to us, it is not itself united to our eyes, but solely sends them a certain representation or image of itself, which we call *species sensibilis* (the sensible figure), by means of which we see it; and when we contemplate or understand anything, what we understand is not united to our understanding, except through another very delicate and spiritual representation or image which we call *species intelligibilis.* These *species* strike the exterior senses, and from thence pass on to the interior, then to the imagination, from there to the active understanding (*intellectus agens*) and finally come to the passive (*intellectus possibilis*). In passing through so many sieves, and under so many files, they are purified, sublimated, and refined, and from sensible become intelligible images."

II

1. All this elaboration of intellectual knowledge is truly admirable; but more admirable still is the mystic phenomenon of infused contemplation. This latter, as we shall see, is more or less perfect according as one is raised more or less above the ordinary manner of knowing. The divine action can go so far as to suspend our interior senses—a thing which, nevertheless, is rare. Most frequently the supernatural action is content with diminishing the labor. Besides, as we can easily see, there are

in all infused contemplation, as there are in all other perceptions, two distinct elements, the *species* or figures (objective element) and the light (subjective element).

In the lowest degree the Holy Ghost comes to our aid by a special light without our receiving new ideas or *species intelligibiles*. The *species intelligibiles* are, then, natural in their formation, but supernatural in their application and use. Sometimes the divine influence acts on the formation of ideas, in such sort that, although they are acquired naturally, they are made more perfect by reason of a special help from God, who aids in forming them.

In the second degree, the *species intelligibiles* are supernatural as to their co-ordination or combination, although natural in the acquisition of elements of which they are formed: God employs the pre-existing species to make new ones.

In the third degree, the *species intelligibiles* are infused and formed directly by divine action without pre-existing elements. These ideas have not passed through the exterior or interior senses. They are pure and simple and raise us to a sublime contemplation after the manner of the angels, who received the ideas of objects that they know at the moment of their creation.

Such are the different degrees of formation of *species intelligibiles* in the *supernatural* intellectual perception. In purely *natural* intellectual knowledge we employ *species* coming from the sensible world, elaborated and combined by the sole powers of reason. Infused contemplation, as we shall see, lifts itself more or less above this ordinary manner of knowing, according to the degrees of perfection it attains.

2. The elucidation of the other terms of the definition has need of only a few words. Infused contemplation has for its immediate principle a *supernatural light.* The light of faith, it is true, suffices with a supernatural help to know and love revealed truth; nevertheless, in order to penetrate farther into the knowledge and love of the Sovereign Good we need more abundant, purer, and more vivid light. The gifts of the Holy Ghost are then accorded to us in a large measure. Sometimes it is a divine light of even an order superior to them, as we shall see later on.

I have said that the soul is introduced into a *superior spiritual region.* Infused contemplation employs a precious supernatural mirror; it penetrates its object in a more intimate manner, whether by reason of a light more abundant and vivid, or because of more pure and sublime *figures.* The soul is then raised into a *superior spiritual region,* for she attains in some sort to the spiritual things themselves, stripped of all foreign admixtures —a thing which evidently constitutes a phenomenon that can be explained only by the *superhuman mode* by which the soul is conducted by the Holy Spirit.

3. Lastly, I have said that infused contemplation is a view *excessively simple and ardently tender.* This it is, because it is a perfect and delicious manner of knowing and loving divine things. In infused contemplation, a more complete and eminent communication of the gifts of the Holy Ghost raises the soul to a superior and altogether eminent degree of light, love, and sweetness. According to St. Thomas, the more exalted a virtue is, the more numerous are the objects to which it extends. This is why the gift of wisdom is superior to

the intellectual virtue of wisdom; this gift in fact brings us much nearer to God, by uniting us to Him in a most intimate manner.

Many receive the gift of wisdom in a most exalted degree, whether to contemplate more profoundly the divine and celestial truths, and to explain them to others, or to direct themselves and others according to the divine law. This degree of wisdom does not pertain to all those who have sanctifying grace, but the Holy Ghost distributes it as He pleases. The more abundant this communication of the gift of wisdom and of the other gifts of the Holy Ghost is, the more simple and tender is contemplation.

SECOND CONFERENCE

How Infused Resembles Acquired Contemplation

I

1. Theologians are wont to discuss several questions regarding the nature and properties of infused contemplation which are of interest to the leisured scholar, but as the purpose of the writer of these conferences is to treat only of subjects that are of practical utility, he is obliged to go on to those more within the ken of the busy worker. A question of interest to all is this: In what does *infused* contemplation resemble *acquired* contemplation?

Between these two kinds of contemplation there are many points of resemblance. (1) All two demand acts of the intellect and of the will. Contemplation, however perfect it may be, is always an elevation of the soul to God by a simple and tender gaze, fixed upon some divine truth. (2) For the one as for the other there is need of an efficacious help on the part of God, and of certain dispositions in the subject. (3) All two have for their principal object God and His infinite perfections, and for their secondary object all that relates to God. But infused contemplation can go much farther than acquired contemplation; for God sometimes imparts to it truths, or, rather, circumstances that have not yet been revealed. (4) The one and the other have for their end union with God, and produce in us infinitely precious effects: recollection, light, strength, sweetness, contempt of the world, the imitation of Jesus Christ, and often heroic virtues; however, these effects are much more supernatural and abundant in infused contemplation.

2. There are many differences between these two sorts of contemplation. Acquired contemplation presupposes labor; it is acquired only by degrees; it is preserved and perfected only by the assiduous exercise of meditation. Infused contemplation, on the other hand, does not depend on human industry, but solely on the goodness of God, who gives it to whom He wills. Faith and the other theological virtues, and even (very probably) the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to a certain degree are the prin-

ciples of acquired contemplation. The theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost in an eminent degree, or some grace gratuitously given, raise souls to infused contemplation.

We contemplate in the common way only by *species* (figures) acquired by the senses. In infused contemplation, if the *species* are acquired by the senses, they are at least supernatural in their application or combination. Sometimes even God produces new ones which do not pass by the senses and which are infused, a thing that lifts the soul to the act of pure intelligence—an act without comparison more perfect and luminous. Nevertheless, in spite of all those undeniable prerogatives of infused over acquired contemplation, we can say that there is no difference between them except in the manner of operating. The essential thing, that is to say, *union with God,* is and remains the end and portion of the one as of the other, though in a different degree.

3. Infused contemplation resembles in some point the natural contemplation of the angels. God gave to the angels at the instant of their creation all the ideas or *species intelligibiles* that form their natural knowledge and com-

plete their faculty of knowing. All these ideas were impressed and remain present in the angelic intellects, so that by them the angels are capable of grasping all that they can naturally comprehend.

In infused contemplation there is something analogous. The *species intelligibiles* are infused, and this is a sort of angelic contemplation. Man, according to the teaching of St. Thomas, can be raised even in the actual state of fallen nature, to this natural contemplation of the angels, and above his own nature, by an extraordinary help of grace, as happens in contemplatives who are judged worthy to receive divine revelations, a grace which was accorded for a greater reason to Adam in the state of innocence. He knew God by an interior inspiration, which was a ray of divine wisdom impressed on his understanding, and not by any idea taken from creatures. Thus man in the state of innocence knew God and divine things in two ways, the one by divine inspiration, which he had in common with the angels; the other by sensible images such as is the proper of man. Adam was like the angel in contemplation when he was raised by grace.

This angelic contemplation of man can take on a perfection altogether exceptional. The soul in this case would dispense with the concurrence of the imagination and its *images* as it happened to Adam during his mysterious sleep, and as it still happens to some privileged souls in the highest degrees of ecstatic union. The possibility appears undeniable to the best theologians; the sole question debated among them is the reality of the fact.

II

1. Here it will be useful for us to learn what mystic authors mean when they speak of operations in the height or in the centre of the soul. They are the most elevated operations of the soul. According to the greater part of mystic authors, we can distinguish in our soul three sorts of operations: (1) the operations of the inferior part, which are called *sensitive* because they are exercised by means of the exterior and the interior senses. The knowledge which the soul acquires by the senses moves the sensitive appetite, which is composed of two parts—the one called concupiscible, the other, irascible. (2) The operations of the superior part of the soul are attributed to *reason* when there is deduction of one point of knowledge from an-

other, and to *intellect* when the truth is seen by a simple gaze or view. To those two ways of knowing corresponds the reasonable appetite. (3) The operations of the superior part of the soul, not in so far as it reasons or as it knows by the use of the senses, but in so far as it contemplates divine things by raising itself above the ordinary manner of knowing, are called *understanding*. If the soul judges of divine things by means of first causes and the most sublime reasons, it is *wisdom* (*notitia excessiva*), according to Blessed Albert the Great. To understanding and to wisdom, supreme modes of operation, where it will be easy to recognize the influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, corresponds the spiritual appetite. Mystic authors confusedly call those last modes of operation of the intelligence and the will: height, inmost, the inmost depth, centre of the soul, point of the spirit, spiritual faculty, simple intelligence, etc.

It goes without saying that we must pass over the common signification of those words "height," "ridge," "centre," etc. The soul has no parts, since it is spiritual. Neither are they different faculties that operate in those different degrees; they are the same faculties, which produce acts more or less pure and perfect. We remark with St. Francis de Sales that the knowledge of those degrees "is very necessary in order to understand writings on spiritual things."

2. Again, it will be good for us to know how we are to understand many expressions of approved mystic authors, who seem to intimate that the soul is purely passive in infused contemplation. It is easy to explain those expressions by the content and by the totality of their doctrine. Thus, when those authors say that the soul ought to annihilate her acts so as to arrive at the divine union, they wish to speak of deliberate acts made by the reasoning power, or by a natural activity which prevents divine communications.

Let us cite as an example St. John of the Cross. "For fear," he says, "of hindering the fruit that we gather from those sentiments, the mind ought not to make any effort, but to remain in a passive state and to incline the will to give with freedom and pleasure its consent to those supernatural communications; one's activity would destroy those perceptions which are extremely delicate and easy to destroy. They are savory and agreeable supernatural delights, which the natural capacity of the understanding cannot comprehend or acquire by any operation; it cannot do any other thing but receive them when God favors it with them. The soul ought to persist, then, in abandoning herself to the divine attractions, with profound humility and in a passive disposition, since all those interior and supernatural touches tend to a union which takes place passively in the soul."

It suffices to read this passage attentively to understand that St. John of the Cross speaks not of annihilation of the acts in a strict and rigorous sense, but solely of the suppression of useless efforts and of natural eagerness. As for the rest, Father Nicholas of Jesus-Mary has replied in a few words to the question that occupies us. "The holy Fathers and mystic doctors," he says, "affirm that, in the act of this contemplation, the operations of the powers cease, and the soul remains *passive*. This is what they call repose, sleep, silence, forgetfulness of creatures, annihilation, etc. We can give many reasons for this manner of speaking: first, because the understanding and the will do not operate from their own initiative or in a manner that is to them connatural, that is to say, by means of discursive acts and images of corporal things, but by a supernatural procedure and by a sublime motion of the Holy Ghost. . . . Secondly, because in this sublime contemplation the mind operates without pain and difficulty with a very great sweetness. . . . Thirdly, because the soul in this contemplation makes no reflection on her acts and perceives not what she does. . . . Fourthly, because in this contemplation, although the soul produces truly an act of knowledge and an act of love which follows this knowledge, nevertheless, because she proceeds by the way of negation, that is to say, in knowing, not what God is, but what he is not (that which is called obscure knowledge or *divine darkness*), it is said on this account that she is bereft of acts of knowledge. . . . For all those reasons, of which each one taken by itself is quite sufficient, St. John of the Cross employed the manner of speaking related above, following in this the example of the holy Fathers and mystic doctors."

3. An important observation may find a place here. The approved mystic authors spoke without foreseeing that persons would one day abuse their writings just as it had happened

before in the seventh century. They would express themselves to-day in a manner more circumspect. St. Thomas made the following remark in the work that he composed to refute some errors of the Greeks: "If we find in the writings of the ancient Greek Fathers some expressions that may appear doubtful to moderns, the reason is that the errors that arose against the faith gave occasion to Doctors of the Church who came afterward to speak with more circumspection. It is thus that the Fathers who wrote before the error of Arius did not speak of the unity of the Divine Nature as clearly as the Fathers who refuted this heretic. We must hold the same judgment of other errors committed not only by other Fathers, but also by the great Doctor, St. Augustine. In the books that he wrote after the heresy of Pelagius he speaks with much greater reserve of the power of free will than he had done before. . . . This is why we must not be astonished if modern doctors, after all those errors, speak of matters of the faith with greater exactitude and precision. In such sort, that if we find in ancient authors some expressions that they did not use with precaution, *we ought not on account of this* *despise or reject their doctrine, but explain it with respect.*"

This last thought of St. Thomas sums up the whole question and it ought to serve as a guide in the reading of approved mystic authors: we shall thus avoid the grave inconvenience of depriving ourselves of an abundant source of edification and of throwing undeserved discredit on the teaching of the Saints.

THIRD CONFERENCE

Mystic Phenomena—Spiritual Senses

I

Before proceeding farther in our study of the many and important questions that have regard to the nature and character of the mystic life, it is good for clearness' sake to lay down two things; first, what we are to understand by *mystic* phenomena; and secondly, whether there are grounds for admitting *spiritual senses* which permit the accomplishment of acts of the mystic life; and if so, in what they consist.

Let us first explain what we are to understand by mystic phenomena. This is the more to be desired as the word mystic has been the cause of much confusion. Its true sense we shall come to know only from its history. In olden times the name theology was given to the knowledge, or rather, to the sentiment, in some sort experimental, which a soul obtained from God by piety and love. "Let us apply ourselves," says St. Ephrem, "to the spiritual life, to the end that, works being added to works, we may become spiritual men: then only shall we become apt in *theology.*" Theology was called contemplation. "Very often," says St. Didacus, "our mind has a repugnance for prayer [*i. e.,* vocal prayer], which contracts and constrains it, but gives itself willingly to theology because the contemplation of things divine dilates it and puts it at its ease."

After a while, to distinguish this experimental from speculative theology, writers added the word *mystic.* Denis the Mystic writes his *Mystic Theology,* where we read at the beginning a text frequently commented on by the Middle Ages: "As to you, O beloved Timothy (God-fearer), employ yourself unceasingly in *mystic* contemplations." The word for a long time preserved this sense. It is in this sense that St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross understood and used it. Bossuet was one of the first to apply it exclusively to absolutely passive states where the soul is incapable of reasoning. Since then, and now particularly, we scarcely know what this word means. Thus, to know what is mystic it is not enough to analyse the word: we must learn the thing it represents according to consecrated usage.

Now, after what we have said, this expression refers to acts and states of the spiritual life where the passivity of the soul is particularly acknowledged. "In this sense," according to Father Poulain, S.J., "*mystic* phenomena are acts and states that our efforts and industry cannot succeed in producing, and that even feebly, or for an instant. Then, fervor, divine love, pertain not necessarily to the mystic state . . . for we all can, when we wish, procure for ourselves, feebly and for an instant, a sentiment of the love of God, that is to say, devotion." This appellation belongs particularly to phenomena which are the result of perfect docility to the illuminations and motions of the Holy Ghost, by reason of the predominance of gifts which enable the soul to act, so to speak, in a divine fashion in order to practise eminent and heroic acts of virtue and to rise to the heights of divine contemplation.

II

1. As to the second question, let me say that in order to comprehend the degrees of intimacy to which God admits the faithful soul,

Holy Scripture and the great mystics employ expressions which seem to indicate the existence of supernatural senses, enabling the soul to better comprehend the divine advances and to reply to them with greater love. We read, in fact, in St. Paul: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the *spirit* that is of God, that we may know the things that are given us from God, which things also we speak not in the learned words of human wisdom, but in the doctrine of the spirit comparing spiritual things with spiritual (*spiritualibus spiritualia comparantes*)" (1 Cor. ii, 12–13). Determining still further his thought, the Apostle says to the Ephesians that "he ceases not to render thanks to God for them . . . in order that . . . He would impart to them a *spirit of wisdom* which makes known to them His knowledge, and that He would enlighten the *eyes* of their heart." And to the Romans: "They that are according to the spirit, mind [*i. e.,* 'feel and taste'] the things that are of the spirit." (Rom. viii, 5.) Thus the spiritual man has a spiritual language: He hears, he sees, he feels, he tastes supernatural things.

2. The servants of God who have been fa-

vored with a greater intimacy with Him, express themselves in the same fashion. In the book of her visions, Blessed Angela of Foligno affirms that "she *saw* and *felt* Christ press her soul with the same hand that had been nailed to the cross."

"O Jesus," cried Gemma Galgani when in ecstasy, "I feel You, I *feel* Your blood flow in my veins." St. John of the Cross, speaking of the action of God in raptures, compares it to the murmur of zephyrs. He says: "A very sublime and delicious knowledge of God and of His perfections enlightens the understanding as a result of delicate touches which these same perfections cause to be felt in the substance of the soul by means of its powers."

St. Teresa, in her description of the spiritual espousals, speaks thus: "God wills that without the soul's knowing how she came out of this visit carrying in her the divine seal." Finally, the holy doctors employ like expressions. St. Thomas, in his commentary on the thirty-third Psalm, tells us that "in corporal things we *see;* then we *taste;* but in spiritual things we must *taste* before we *see*. No one knows, if he does not taste. For this reason it is said: *taste* and then, see; '*Gustate et videte.*'" (Ps. xxxiii, 9.)

The Venerable Bartholomew of the Martyrs writes in the same manner: "Those who love God with their whole heart *touch, taste,* and *feel* God; thanks to a spiritual sense of touch, taste, and smell with which they are favored." "By means of those spiritual senses," says Blessed Albert the Great, "the soul perceives the spiritual things which she is permitted to contemplate in the beauty of her Spouse. . . . She *perceives* in the harmonies of His splendor extremely sweet *sounds.* . . . The delights of the Incarnation of the Word procure for her an exquisite *savor.* . . . She *breathes* an exhilarating perfume in the infinite wisdom that exhales from the Word and from His radiation. . . . She *feels* an incomparable sweetness in the mysterious *touch* of this Word, which is felt in her. . . . She is filled with the most ardent charity by the presence of this Incarnate Word, who delights thus in the company of men and delivers Himself to their embraces and pious osculations." Such is the language of Holy Scripture, of the servants of God, and of the doctors of the

Church. There is, then, ground for retaining expressions which designate certain *spiritual or supernatural senses.*

3. But what are we to understand by these senses? In the first place, it is certain that there is no question of material senses of a superior order, which enable the soul to represent to herself divine conversations and mysterious touches, even as the imagination recalls sensible sounds and impressions. Father Poulain very justly remarks, that this would not be a means of entering into real relations with pure spirits, but all the more with corporal objects, such as the symbols that would represent these spirits. It would concern an imitation purely intellectual.

4. But if there can be question only of spiritual senses, are these senses true faculties which enable the soul to enter into relations with God and the angels, as those heavenly spirits do with one another? Or are they simple supernatural aptitudes, created in the soul by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, that give it impressions analogous to those that come from the senses? Or, lastly, are those expressions purely metaphorical, responding to no reality

distinct from phenomena proper to the mystic life?

On this subject there is a great variety of opinions. Poulain holds that those spiritual senses are true faculties, which enable the contemplative soul to feel the presence of God, as the angels feel their reciprocal presence. Father Lamballe, on the contrary, seems to see in these expressions only simple metaphors. Father Arintero, O.P., while recognizing that these terms are metaphorical, would have the metaphors based on a real analogy. These spiritual impulses would be manifestations and derivations of the gifts of *understanding* and *wisdom*. In fact, by the accentuation of those gifts, the soul receives a very elevated knowledge of God and a marvellous experience of the mystic life. There is in them, then, an important reality, which we must, as far as possible, designate by intelligible terms as referring to this species of impressions. These terms are those of *sense,* which, in the circumstances, become *spiritual or supernatural senses.*

FOURTH CONFERENCE

Errors in Treating of the Subject of Passive Prayers

I

1. It is a maxim with mountain climbers that, the higher the peaks they essay to scale, the more uncertain becomes the footing, and the more dangerous the fall they are liable to come by. And so with aspirants to the higher reaches of the spiritual life, the nearer they approach to the summit of the mystic state, the more giddy becomes their poise, and the more disastrous the errors they are liable to fall into, unless guided by the spirit of wisdom and knowledge.

We have now in our mystic speculations climbed the very ridge of the supernatural life. We have familiarized ourselves with the trials and temptations that beset the most intrepid seekers after perfection. It behooves us to be wary lest, with the false mystics, we fall into errors that turn us from our goal.

What, then, are the errors we can fall into in speaking of passive prayers?

There are two principal errors in this matter. The first, is to exclude from those passive prayers, not only discursive acts, but also *direct* acts, that is to say, the most simple and delicate motions of the soul. The second error consists in maintaining that the act of contemplation can be continual. Although those two errors condemned by the Church are theoretically little widespread in our days, it will not be inopportune to say some words on them in order to do away with the dangers of a like illusion in practice.

2. Nothing is easier to establish than the proposition that the most perfect contemplation is neither purely passive nor continual.

What contemplation more sublime than the beatific vision? It renders the blessed happy for all eternity; and, nevertheless, the powers of the soul are not only not deprived of their operations, but their operations become more perfect. St. Thomas says in express terms that beatitude is an operation, because the beatitude of man is his last perfection. "It is necessary that the last perfection of man be an operation, because all powers, all causes, everything that is capable of acting, is always imperfect when it is wanting in action and repose. Every power looks forward to its action as to its end." This rule is so general that, in God Himself, as in angels and men, beatitude consists in operation. "In God," says St. Thomas, "beatitude is by essence, because His operation is His being. Beatitude, the last perfection of the angels, consists in perfect operation, by which they are united to an uncreated Good. This operation is unique in them and lasts always; it will be their life for all eternity. Finally, on earth the last perfection of men, as far as they are capable of it, is the operation that unites them to God. But this operation cannot be *continual;* the weakness of our nature forces us to interrupt it often; and we are as far removed from perfect beatitude as we are from the unity and continuity of the act. It will only be in Heaven that the operation that will render us happy will be simple, continual, and eternal, as is that of the angels. In this world the participation that man can have in beatitude is so much the greater as it is the more simple and continual, and as it is found in the simplest and most continual operation of the contemplative life, which is contemplation itself. Imperfect souls, who, on a false principle of quietude, fancy themselves to be in repose, are in reality only in a state of pure and dangerous idleness. What good do they do, and what good can they do, since one can neither merit nor practise virtue, nor strengthen habits, except by acts?"

3. Contemplation, we see, can be neither continual nor purely passive. Granted even that a very intense act of contemplation, or acts of contemplation often repeated, could engender a certain facility, this would be a habit, and not an act. Now, contemplation is an act, not a habit, and even if one would have the intention of contemplating always, the contemplation would not be continual, for virtual duration only is attributed to intention. The continual act of false mystics is, therefore, impossible; for in contemplation the acts are often interrupted, the acts of the intellect perhaps more frequently even than those of the will. Contemplation is essentially an act of the intelligence and the will; when the act ceases, contemplation is ended. Meanwhile, irreproachable authors, while refusing to admit the *continual* contemplation of false mystics, have recognized the possibility of a *continual*

act in a moderate degree. "When the soul is attached to God by contemplation," says Dom Le Masson, "and when she is occupied in His holy presence, she is in an act essential and *continued* without interruption, which embraces all the acts that she can do then without her having need of the operations of her powers; she feels, she understands, but she acts only by a free and *continuous* consent, for every other act of her powers is suspended." And Bossuet: "The absurdity of this doctrine is seen at first sight by the most ignorant. To attribute a perpetual steadiness, even during sleep or in the midst of the great distractions, to an act of freewill, is to confound the act with the habitual disposition which can be in the heart. After all, it would be necessary to tell us where they have got this new principle that every act endures of itself if it is not revoked; for, on the contrary, it is a constant principle, founded on reason and experience, that every act is of itself transient, and that a perpetual act is an act of the other life."

However, we can say that, outside of actual contemplation, there exists a passive *habitual* state, in this sense that the soul becomes more supple under the hand of God, and better disposed to recollection—a disposition that prepares her to produce more easily the acts of passive contemplation. The wood that has already been kindled and that still smokes is enkindled more easily a second time; thus a soul excited to devotion, or already favored many times with a supernatural light, will more easily receive the impressions of the same favors.This disposition to receive the motions of the Holy Ghost suffices to indicate that one is in the passive state, but it is not a permanent and continual act.

II

1. This leads us to inquire, what is the duration of the contemplative act?

The act of itself lasts a very short time. There is question here of the *principal act* of infused contemplation. The splendor of the light which dazzles and, so to say, overwhelms the mind, and the weakness of our nature, which permits us not to bear for a long time this suspensive acquiescence, necessitate some relaxation. Besides, the experience of the saints is here of great authority. All affirm that the contemplative act is of very short duration. How long exactly does it last? It is difficult to fix a precise time. Meanwhile, having regard to the more or less advanced state of souls, and, above all, to the degree of contemplation to which God raises them, we can determine to a certain point the duration of the contemplative act.

In the prayer of passive recollection and of quietude, especially with those who are beginners, the contemplative act is momentary: it lasts only an instant and at intervals; it is as a flash of lightning which shines and disappears. St. Teresa says that this prayer of quietude is a *spark* that God throws into the soul. Elsewhere she recounts that, in the first year of her religious life, our Lord deigned to raise her to the prayer of quietude, and sometimes even to that of union. "This union," she adds, "lasted only a very short time; I knew not even if it was the time of an *Ave Maria.*"

In the prayer of simple union with more advanced souls the contemplative act lasts a little longer. The soul, being much purified and having made notable progress in virtue, is raised more easily towards Heaven under the influence of a greater communication of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. St. Teresa affirms, however, that the prayer of union never lasts for half an hour. "In that which concerns the ecstatic union," she says, "we must distinguish two very different things: the most sublime act of contemplation, that is to say, the time of the suspension of all its powers, and the interior and exterior effects which accompany these supernatural impressions. The suspension of the powers always lasts a very short time—half an hour, perhaps; the effects of this suspension, and in particular the union of the will, can last much longer. This suspension of all the powers never lasts long," she continues; "it is much when it lasts half an hour, and I don't believe that it has ever lasted so long. . . . Every time that this general suspension takes place, it scarcely passes that time when one of the powers does not come to itself. The will is that which maintains itself the best in the divine union. But this state of complete ecstasy is, I repeat it, of short duration. I add that the powers, returning to themselves only imperfectly, may remain in a sort of delirium for the space of some hours, during which God from time to time ravishes them anew and draws them to Him." We can trust to the experience of St. Teresa. It appears very probable, then, that the contemplative act, properly speaking, even the most perfect act of consummate union, does not endure, at least ordinarily, for half an hour. Some authors accord more, it is true, but they suppose cases excessively rare; their opinion is based on facts related in the lives of the saints, and especially on the great principle that there is nothing impossible to God.

2. Here again the desire of complete and satisfactory knowledge leads us to inquire, what is understood by direct acts of contemplation.

Direct acts are the most perfect acts of contemplation. We oppose them to discursive acts, to express that they are made without reasoning and by a simple gaze or regard. Direct acts sometimes go farther still; they are then so still that they have nothing sufficiently marked by which the soul can recognize them. In this case we oppose them to *reflex* acts or *perceived* ones. All direct acts are operated in the *centre* of the soul by means of *species intelligibiles* more or less supernatural, and with the help of a very brilliant and clear light. As Bossuet observes, direct acts have something else besides, simple, natural, sincere perhaps, which comes more from the depth of the soul.

St. Antony speaks of direct acts when he says: "There is no perfect prayer, if the solitary is conscious that he is praying." "The more sublime the contemplation," says Father Surin, "the less distinct it is." Meanwhile it is certain that the true spiritual knowledge, the abundance of celestial lights, the greatest gifts of divine Wisdom come to us in this way. It is this ignorance that is so much lauded by mystic doctors. Behold what is contemplation: it consists not in reasoning, nor in the multitude of distinct and particular perceptions with which one is enriched, but in this simple and confused operation of which we speak.

Direct acts of true contemplation do not indicate a dangerous idleness: they are, on the contrary, the characters of a very perfect and intimate perception of the truth. A soul may be elevated to a high state of contemplation, and, at the same time, imagine that she has lost her time, because she operates with facility and delight. In a like case, if the soul, after prayer, finds herself humble, peaceful, detached, zealous for the practice of virtues, we can be assured that it is the sign of a good prayer: but if there are none of those good effects, we must believe that it is somnolence or idleness.

Meanwhile we must remember that direct acts of contemplation are free. The soul is always free in acts of contemplation, even ecstatic. St. Thomas, speaking of the sleep of Solomon, says that this sleep was not a natural, but a prophetic sleep, and that in this state a man preserves the use of freewill. Some authors, it is true, have sustained the contrary; but Suarez, in accord with St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Chrysostom, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, and others, affirms that the soul preserves her freewill even in the highest contemplation.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

The Divine Darkness

I

"Who [*God*] *only hath immortality, and inhabiteth light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen, nor can see."* (*1 Tim. vi, 16.*)

1. Speaking generally, it may be said that the contemplative soul is always more or less occupied in the same manner in infused contemplation. Meanwhile, we can bring under two great divisions the direct acts of this kind of contemplation, which are otherwise very multiple and varied. The first division consists of direct acts which refer to contemplation, general, confused, obscure, by way of negation, and which mystic authors also call obscure contemplation or Divine Darkness. The second consists of direct acts which are produced in particular, clear, distinct contemplation by way of affirmation. In the latter, God makes

known His marvellous secrets, and this by way of visions, supernatural words, revelations, and spiritual sentiments; of which we shall speak later on.

Meanwhile, let us consider the former contemplation, which mystic authors call Divine Darkness. It is, as we have said, a general, confused, obscure perception of the truth by way of negation. The better to comprehend the nature of this Divine Darkness, it is good to recall here briefly in what contemplation by the way of negation consists.

We contemplate God according to our natural mode of cognition only in the mirror of His creatures. When we speak of His goodness and beauty, it is the goodness and beauty of creatures that we have directly before our eyes. Our experience has never mounted higher. All that we conceive of positive things, in spite of our efforts to remove their imperfection, does not go beyond the creature. We understand, then, that, to pass to a wholly supernatural contemplation of God, it would be necessary to eliminate all the feeble images borrowed from creatures; and as God does not yet manifest Himself as He is in Himself, the soul does not see anything distinct, but feels herself solely in the presence of Him who infinitely surpasses all conception.

2. Let us cite some passages from Denis the Mystic on the Divine Darkness. "The Divine Obscurity," he says, "is nothing else than that inaccessible light in which it is said that the Lord dwells (1 Tim. vi, 16). Although it be invisible by reason of its transcendent lights, and inaccessible by reason of its supernatural brightness, nevertheless, whoever has merited to see and know God, reposes in it, and by this even that he neither sees nor knows, he is truly in Him who surpasses all sight and all knowledge.

"Then, delivered from the sensible and intellectual world, the soul enters into the mysterious obscurity of a holy ignorance, and, giving up all scientific data, loses herself in Him who can be neither seen nor grasped, being entirely given up to her Sovereign Object; without belonging to herself or others; united to the unknown by the noblest part of herself, and by reason of her renunciation of knowledge; finally, imbibing in this absolute ignorance a knowledge which the understanding cannot conquer. . . . We long to enter into this luminous obscurity, and to see and know precisely, by the effect of our blindness and mystic ignorance, Him who transcends all contemplation and all knowledge. For it is truly to see and to know, it is to praise the infinite in a supereminent manner, to say that He is nothing of that which exists.

"Darkness is dissipated before the light," adds our pious author, "especially before an abundant light; ignorance is corrected by perceptions, above all, by varied perceptions. It is not thus with mystic ignorance, which is not a privation, but a superiority of knowledge. You say, then, and it is true, that the true light is not perceived by those who rejoice in it, and that the ignorance which is according to God goes not with the knowledge of creatures. Thus this sublime darkness is inaccessible to all light and outshines all knowledge, and if, in seeing God, we comprehend what we see, it is not God that we contemplate, but rather some one of the things which pertain to Him, and which we can know. As for Him, superior to all understanding, to all existence, He subsists supereminently and is known in a transcendent manner."

Such is, according to Denis the Mystic, the perfect knowledge of God which results from a sublime ignorance.

3. Before going farther in the confirmation of the preceding doctrine, let us make a very important and practical remark. Whatever be the perfection of this general and confused perception, it does not follow that one ought to exclude absolutely the contemplation of the divine perfections which are more particular, as justice, clemency, wisdom. We ought to follow the attraction of grace, according as God calls us to it, and to occupy ourselves now with one, now with another of those perfections, as well as the mysteries of faith, the Incarnation, etc. To wish to fix ourselves in a permanent manner in the heights of the Divine Darkness would be to attempt the impossible and to fall into a sad illusion. God measures differently the signal graces of contemplation, and He gives them to whom He wills and when He pleases. We cannot recall too often this fundamental truth of the spiritual life.

4. St. Thomas in many places of his writings reproduces the doctrine of the great mystic on the Divine Darkness. He comments on it; he

explains it; he makes it his own even in the terms that he adopts. We cannot reproduce all the passages where the Angelic Doctor speaks of *divine darkness,* of *sublime ignorance,* of *inaccessible light,* of a *very luminous obscurity.* We shall give only two citations. St. Paul, addressing himself to the Hebrews (xii, 18), had said: "You are not come to a mountain that might be touched, and a burning fire, . . . and an obscure cloud." St. Thomas adds this reflection: "Just as it is not possible to see distinctly what is in obscurity, and as a great light dazzles; so is it in divine contemplation; He who dwells in inaccessible light blinds us by the excess of His splendor."

The spouse in the Canticle (ii, 9) perceives her Beloved. "Behold," she says, "He standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices." "This wall," says St. Thomas, "is our mortal life, which rises as a thick screen between us and God, and prevents us from seeing Him. Adam enjoyed the sight and conversation of God: but sin has raised a wall of separation, by introducing infirmities of all kinds, which weigh us down and lead us to death; for, as the Wise Man says (Wisd. ix, 15), "the corruptible body is a load upon the soul, and the earthly habitation presseth down upon the mind that museth upon many things."

5. Now, behold what the spouse says: "That her Beloved," whom a little while ago she had compared to a roe and a young hart (as "He cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping over the hills"), "now hides Himself behind a wall." In fact, at one time Jesus Christ comes near us and lets Himself be seen by us as far as possible; and at another, He removes Himself from us and flies away as "a roe or a young hart"; and because there is a wall between us and Him, and we cannot see Him, He has deigned to open windows and place lattices in this wall so that we may be able to contemplate Him and see Him in some manner. It is because of this that the spouse says: "He looketh through the windows and peepeth through the lattices," as if the grace that God gives us of contemplating Him in a mirror and enigmatically, opened windows and placed lattices through the wall that separates us from Him.

We can also refer those words, "Behold Him who standeth behind our wall," to the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, as if He were hidden behind a wall in taking our flesh. Then these words: "He looketh through the windows and through the lattices" refer to His Divinity. In fact He who looks through the lattices sees all that passes outside, and Himself is seen by no one. It is thus that God sees and weighs all things, but we can neither see nor weigh Him. This last text has appeared to us sufficiently remarkable to deserve to be cited in full, although it does not apply in all its extent to the subject that occupies us. But at the bottom of this pious commentary we can recognize the Divine Darkness. This wall is our mortal life, which raises a thick screen between us and God, and prevents us from seeing Him *distinctly*. This contemplation "in a mirror and in enigma," are "the windows and the lattices through the wall" which permit us to contemplate Him by way of negation and of sublime ignorance. From all we have said it is easy to convince oneself that the doctrine of St. Thomas on the Divine Darkness is conformed to that of St. Denis.

II

1. On account of the importance of this subject of infused contemplation which mystic authors call the Divine Darkness, and of the

difficulty of its comprehension, it is good for us to see how it is treated by other mystic authors; and first, by St. Teresa and Blessed Angela of Foligno.

St. Teresa thus describes this contemplation: "In this new state all sentiment ceases. The soul is absorbed by enjoyment without comprehending what she enjoys. She rejoices in a good that comprises in itself alone all goods, and yet the nature of this good remains incomprehensible to her."

2. Blessed Angela of Foligno develops the same thought: "My soul was one day enraptured," she says, "and I saw God in a light superior to all that I had seen heretofore, in a plenitude above all plenitude. . . . At that moment I saw God in a *darkness,* and behold the reason of this darkness: God is too elevated above the mind, and all that we can think or comprehend has no proportion with Him. Then there was given me a very certain faith, a very firm hope, and a security perfect and without fear. I gathered myself entirely into the Infinite Good which I saw in the *darkness* and I felt in myself such confidence in God that I could not doubt His presence. . . . Often I see God thus in the infinite and ineffa-

ble Good, in a *darkness* where I repose in peace and totally recollected. In this Good most certain, although hidden and dark, I have placed all my hope; in seeing Him I possess all that I wish to possess; I know all that I wish to know; for in Him I see all good. I cannot believe that He will separate Himself from me, or me from Him. Nothing can separate us hereafter. My soul feels an ineffable joy in this unique Good, but what she sees cannot be conceived by thought or expressed in words. I see nothing and I see all. The more this infinite Good is seen in *darkness,* the more certain it is, and the more it exceeds all. I see in this *darkness* that this Good is above all, and that all the rest is darkness beside God, with whom nothing can be compared. When the soul sees the divine power, the divine wisdom, and the divine will, as it happened to me in a manner marvellous to myself, that appears less than this. What I see now is a whole; as for the rest, one would call them parts. When the soul sees what we spoke of just now, she cannot speak of it, it is true, but she feels a great joy in it which reacts upon the body; but when God manifests Himself in the *darkness,* He brings neither sensible joy, nor ardor, nor devotion, nor fervent love. The body feels nothing; it sees nothing; the soul sees. The body rests and sleeps, and the tongue, paralysed, keeps silence. All the numerous and ineffable marks of friendship that God has given me, all the consolations and all the other graces that He has accorded me, are small beside the Infinite Good that I see in the Divine Darkness. Thus I have not put my sole hope in all those things, and if they had deceived me, this would not change the illimitable confidence that I possess in my heart and for the Infinite Good that appeared to me in the *immense darkness.* I have been able to see God only three times in the highest degree of the immense darkness, although it has been given me to see Him very often in the *darkness* in a manner less sublime. . . . I see the Holy Trinity in *profound darkness,* and in the Trinity I believe to see myself; behold what draws me more than all I have seen or felt up to the present. All that I say appears to me as nothing; nay, it seems to me that I utter blasphemies, so much does this infinite Good surpass all."

3. When treating of the divine darkness, it would not be fitting to pass over the description given of it by St. John of the Cross, one

of its greatest exponents. He has left us on this subject explanations which sum up all the teaching of the saints.

"Obscure contemplation," he says, "by which the soul ascends to enter upon the union of love, is called, the *secret stair,* because of two properties that are found in it. We give the name of secret contemplation to this obscure contemplation because it is the *mystic theology* which the Doctors call secret wisdom, and which, according to the doctrine of St. Thomas, is imparted and infused into the soul more particularly by the way of divine love, without the help of the natural operations of her understanding and of her other powers. It is called secret, because the Holy Ghost pours it into the soul as it pleases Him, as the Spouse in the Canticles says of it; and, in fact, neither she [the soul] nor any one else, nor the devil himself knows the mystery of it: for the Divine Master, who instructs the soul, remains in her and there operates secretly. We call it secret also because of the effects that it produces. It is secret not only when it purifies mysteriously in the midst of darkness and trials, but also when wisdom is poured out on the soul in the midst of a great light. It is, then, so hidden that the soul cannot perceive it and cannot find terms to express it, for besides that she does not wish to give knowledge of it, she has no means of making known a wisdom so sublime and a spiritual sentiment so delicate. All reasoning and all comparisons are incapable of making known this mystery; in such sort that this contemplation is always secret and unknown.

"This *mystic theology* or divine wisdom is so simple and spiritual that, not entering into the understanding clothed with images or *species sensibiles,* the imagination and the senses cannot represent it. Nevertheless, the soul tastes and knows it in some manner; but words are wanting to develop it. Such is the divine language which, the more interior, spiritual, and raised above the senses it is, the more it halts the operations of the imagination, the mind, and the other powers of man.

"This inability of the soul comes from this, that God speaks to her in obscure contemplation: as He speaks directly to the soul which is all spirit, the senses cannot either know or express this interior and spiritual word. . . . When the graces which the soul receives are particular, as visions, certain delights of God, etc., and when they are represented under certain sensible images, the senses can have some knowledge of them, and the soul can find expressions and comparisons to explain them. But that becomes impossible in pure and infused contemplation; and it is for this reason that we call it secret, hidden, and unknown.

"This contemplation is again secret, not only because it is essentially supernatural, but also because it conducts the soul to the perfection of the divine union, unknown to men, and at which one arrives only by being ignorant of where or how he arrives at it."

SIXTH CONFERENCE

The Formal Elicitive Principles of Infused Contemplation

I

1. In this our third volume on the Interior Life we have treated in part of the Mystic Life, that sublime and altogether supernatural life where the soul acts entirely under the divine influence and with the aid of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. In particular we have treated of the nature and effects of the union of the soul with God, and of the means of augmenting that union. Again, we have treated of the passive purification of the soul in general and in its two domains, the senses and the spirit, and the principal temptations that ordinarily accompany passive purifications, and, lastly, we have treated of the nature and character of infused contemplation.

To-day we continue the treatment of the same sublime subject, and we inquire as to what are the formal elicitive principles of that contemplation.

By the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation we mean those sources or powers by means of which such contemplation is elicited or accomplished; and they may be said to be in general the intellectual faculties of man, and certain gifts or graces which God accords to man so as to enable him to rise to this contemplation. Those faculties and those gifts concur indivisibly to the same act. The supernatural, grafted on the natural, is united and so identified with it that the formal elicitive principle complete, total, and adequate of the contemplative act becomes one: the intellectual faculties of man are exercised under the influence of a superior principle, which perfects and transforms them. This is why mystic authors understand generally by formal elicitive principles the near and immediate principles whence the acts of infused contemplation proceed, that is to say, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, or some *gratuitously given grace*. If these near and immediate principles are *habits,* like the gifts of the Holy Ghost, an actual grace puts them in exercise in a special manner; if they are purely passing phenomena, such as those that come from *gratuitously given graces,* the same supernatural motion produces in the soul the power of sight and vision.

2. All mystic authors are of accord in recognizing the gifts of Wisdom and Understanding as formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation. Many add to them the gift of Knowledge; for, as we shall shortly see, besides that this gift is an immediate preparation in the ascent of the soul towards God by means of His creatures, it can also, by its union with the gifts of Wisdom and Understanding, coöperate to infused contemplation itself. We shall, therefore, speak successively of the gifts of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding.

3. If we consider contemplation from the point of view of the supernatural relish which comes to join itself to perception, it is without doubt that the gift of Wisdom passes to the first rank; but if we enter into the order of intellectual operations produced in this holy exercise, we must follow the order that we have indicated and which is that adopted by the best authors.

First, let us say that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are absolutely necessary for infused contemplation, since this contemplation surpasses our ordinary manner of knowing and acting, and since the gifts of the Holy Ghost are necessary to us every time that we have to produce excellent or supereminent acts. Now, there is nothing more perfect or excellent than the simple and loving regard of this contemplation, where the soul feels a foretaste of Heaven. In attributing in contemplation a distinct office to the gifts of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding, we do not mean to say that they exercise a separate and independent influence. The gifts of the Holy Ghost do not cease to lend one another a mutual concurrence. The gift of Understanding superadds its penetrating action to the gift of Knowledge in the perception of created things, and to the gift of Wisdom in the perception of divine things. It is thus that, in the same contemplation, they operate either all together, or one after another. Here is an example: By the gift of Understanding we penetrate and contemplate a perfection of God or a truth touching creatures. In as far as those things pertain to eternal truths, we judge of them and we relish them by the gift of Wisdom; in as far as they concern creatures, we judge of them by the gift of Knowledge. So, too, in the contemplation of the two natures in Jesus Christ, or of sanctifying grace enclosed in the Sacraments, we can at the same time penetrate those truths of faith by the gift of Understanding, judge of them and taste them in as far as they are divine by the gift of Wisdom, know and judge them in as far as they are created by the gift of Knowledge; and even make the application of them in particular cases by the gift of Counsel.

4. Here it might be asked: Is the gift of Knowledge in reality one of the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation?

Infused contemplation, in order to raise itself to divine things, which are its principal object, sometimes takes its point of departure in creatures. These then become its secondary object. God accords the gift of Knowledge in order to make us see His image in all creatures. Already, it is true, by a primary communication of the gift of Knowledge, the soul is raised to God by means of visible things in acquired contemplation; but she has not received this gift in a degree so eminent and its horizons were not so vast.

Some authors have denied to the gift of Knowledge all active coöperation in infused contemplation. We believe that a more attentive view would not have denied this important concurrence, at least for certain contemplative acts, where the view of the soul is fixed on God without completely losing sight of creatures. The great mystics, in speaking of the *straight motion* in contemplation, where the gift of Knowledge comes in, have acknowledged this fact, confirmed by the experience of all the saints, namely, that the spectacle of nature raises us to God and aids us to see Him. "God has left in creatures," says St. John of the Cross, "a reflection of His perfections. Not content with drawing them from nothingness, He has enriched them with innumerable graces and qualities. God has looked upon all things only by His Son, *the figure, i. e.,* the perfect image, *of His substance,* and this suffices to give them, together with being, the natural qualities which render them perfect, and He not only imparted to them through His Son being and natural graces, but also clothed them with a new beauty of a supernatural order, when He raised humanity to divine beauty in the mystery of the Incarnation; for all creatures, being contained in man, partake with him of this honor."

Denis the Carthusian, after having neglected to speak explicitly of the gift of Knowledge in his magnificent treatise *On Contemplation,* in order to apply himself to set forth the importance of the gift of Understanding, and above all the gift of Wisdom, returns in a very explicit manner in many of his writings to the active and efficacious concurrence of the gift of Knowledge in contemplation. According to him the anagogic perceptions, that is to say, the most elevated perceptions, are not strange to the gift of Knowledge. Elsewhere he is made to say to the Divine Saviour in a dialogue that the gift of Knowledge concurs with the gift of Wisdom in affective and deiform contemplation. Finally, he often applies himself to show how by the knowledge of creatures one arrives at the contemplation of the Creator. As for the rest, this doctrine, entirely conformable to the teaching of St. Thomas, furnishes to the elevations of the soul to God a solid nourishment which, it seems to us, it would be very rash to neglect.

II

1. Let us now see what are the effects of the gift of Knowledge in infused contemplation.

The first and principal effect of the gift of Knowledge, we have said, is to make us know and discern with great surety of judgment all the things that we ought to refer to God. In infused contemplation this knowledge and judicious discernment are carried to the highest degree. The gift of Knowledge is, therefore, the formal elicitive principle of the knowledge that God gives us of creatures by a sort of supernatural experience, without there being need of recurring to reasoning. Enlightened to the highest degree by the gift of Knowledge, the contemplative soul sees in a very exact and elevated manner the nothingness of all that the world loves and seeks after: the vanity of riches, honors, and pleasures. She comprehends the divine symbolism hidden in each creature. She appraises especially the value and merit of humiliations and sufferings. This light is not superficial or uncertain: it is a profound conviction, for its principle is a participation of the divine Knowledge.

The second effect of the gift of Knowledge in infused contemplation is to act upon the will by conducting it to the true Good. Directed supernaturally by the gift of Knowledge, the soul called to this contemplation sees not only the truth of things in God alone, the nothingness and the vanity of creatures, the value and the merit of sufferings; there is more: she employs all to go generously to God. Creatures raise her promptly to her Creator, and sufferings recall to her the Passion of her Divine Saviour: they are as so many mysterious steps that conduct her to the divine union.

2. Let us show by an example how the gift of Knowledge can lead the soul to infused contemplation by means of creatures.

This we shall do by citing a commentary of St. Thomas on the Canticle of Canticles. We shall first give the text: "Behold, my beloved, thou art fair and comely. . . . My beloved is white and ruddy chosen out of thousands. His head is as the finest gold: his locks as branches of palm trees, black as a raven. His eyes are as doves upon brooks of water, which are washed with milk, and sit beside the plentiful streams. His cheeks are as beds of aromatical plants set by skilful perfumers. His lips are as lilies dropping choice myrrh. His hands are turned and as of gold full of hyacinths," etc. (Cant. i, 15; v, 10–14.)

The symbolism of the inspired words did not escape St. Thomas: "Thou art, O my Beloved, the source of all beauty. We call Thee Beauty and Grace, because Thou art admirable in Thy eternal divinity, and in Thy majestic humanity. . . . *My Beloved shines by the whiteness of His virginity and the carnation of His dolorous Passion: He is white,* because He is pure from all sin in His birth and in His whole life. *He is blood color,* because 'He has washed us from all sin in His Precious Blood' (Apoc. i). *He is chosen out of thousands,* for, 'Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man,' was chosen by His Father to save all men, and it is solely by grace that He merited for us that the human race be healed. *His head is as the finest gold.* The head of the Spouse is God, according to the word of the Apostle: 'The head of Christ is God.' (1 Cor. xi.) The head of the Spouse is compared to the purest gold, because, as gold is the most precious of all metals, so God infinitely surpasses all creatures come from His almighty hands. *His locks are as branches of palm trees, black as a raven.* The locks of the Spouse signify faithful souls, united to God by faith and love. They are compared to young palm branches; among other trees the palm is distinguished by its height, its noble bearing, and its transcendent lustre. It rears itself always towards heaven, and never loses its vigor. The locks of the Spouse are brilliant and shining. They resemble young palm branches, because faithful souls, strengthened by faith, unceasingly lift themselves by their desires towards the eternal rewards and enjoy a foretaste of heaven. *They are black as a raven.* Those souls, indeed, are often visited and humbled by the numerous tribulations of this life. *His eyes are as doves upon the brooks of waters, which are washed with milk.* The eyes of the Spouse are the gifts of the Holy Ghost, for it is said in the Apocalypse (v, 6): 'And I saw: and behold in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the ancients, a Lamb standing as it were slain, having seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God.' Those doves *have been washed in milk,* that is to say, in divine grace; *they sit beside the plenteous streams,* because they drink at the abundant and pure sources of the Gospel. *His cheeks are as beds of aromatic plants set by skilled perfumers.* The cheeks of the Spouse are the modesty, piety and holiness of Jesus Christ. They are compared to beds of aromatic plants, which are not only agreeable to behold, but also delightful to smell. The infinite goodness of Jesus does the same in souls: it draws and rejoices. *His lips are as lilies dropping choice myrrh.* The lips of the Spouse, are the word of the Divine Master: it is compared to lilies, because of the pure and dazzling spendors of the eternity that it announces. *His hands are of gold, made at the turning-wheel, adorned with hyacinths.* The hands of the Spouse are the work of our Redemption. They are made at the turning-wheel, because of the omnipotence of the Saviour, who has only to will our salvation to effect it immediately. They are of gold, for they are divine. Finally, they are adorned with hyacinths. This precious stone is blue, which signifies the hope and desire of Heaven. The hands of the Spouse are adorned with hyacinths because all that He did for our salvation ought to give us a firm hope, and to excite us to the desire of heaven." Thus far St. Thomas.

The faithful soul, enlightened by the gift of Knowledge, will apply herself, after the example of St. Thomas, to contemplate the infinite beauty of her Divine Spouse, hidden under mysterious symbols. "She must learn to contemplate the divine secrets hidden under symbols," remarks Denis the Mystic. "She must break this covering and consider them in their nudity and native purity; for thus shall we disclose this fountain of life, which at once flows and is maintained in itself." And elsewhere the same Doctor adds: "By the magnificent order of the universe which God has established, and where shine the images and vestiges of divine ideas, we are raised, as by a natural and easy path, even to the Sovereign Being, as far as our strength permits, denying all but Him, and placing Him above all, and considering Him as the cause of all." But in order to arrive at the contemplation of the divine secrets hidden under symbols, we must have the key of all those mysterious things. This key is the gift of Knowledge accorded in a large measure to souls called to the superior degrees of infused contemplation.

SEVENTH CONFERENCE

The Gift of Wisdom Chief Among the Formal Elicitive Principles of Infused Contemplation

1. Among the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation the gift of Wisdom undoubtedly holds the first place. This is a gift of the Holy Ghost, which manifests to us divine things by means of their primary causes and the most sublime proofs, and enables us to form of them a judgment sound and full of delights. This gift, awarded to the third degree, which is the most elevated, is, on the testimony of all authors, the most active and important principle of infused contemplation, but especially of the contemplation called the Divine Darkness or Mystic Theology. Let us go back to what we have said elsewhere on this subject and we shall find in the texts cited from Denis the Mystic, St. Thomas, St. Teresa, Blessed Angela of Foligno, and St. John of the Cross authentic and unexceptionable

testimonies of this action of the gift of Wisdom. Denis the Carthusian affirms this doctrine in all his writings with a lucidity, a precision, and a persistence that enlighten and edify at the same time. We can, in fact, consider this great Mystic Doctor as the apostle of the gift of Wisdom, as we can see in the texts we shall cite from him presently.

2. The effects of the gift of Wisdom in infused contemplation pass all expression. It is a very perfect and supereminent perception of divine things. Speculative and practical at the same time, it is also a judgment sound and full of sweetness, a relish all celestial, which sheds a new and abundant source of divine light in the soul. To read the name that is written at the summit of contemplation, we must taste its ineffable delights. "To him that overcometh I will give . . . a white counter, and in the counter, a new name written, which no man knoweth, but he that receiveth it." (Apoc. ii, 17.)

According to Denis the Carthusian, the effects of the gift of Wisdom in infused contemplation are concentrated on two principal points: the soul becomes the *counsellor* and *secretary* of God; true expressions, profound and sublime, which admirably indicate the action of God in the Divine Darkness. The soul is the *counsellor* of God, because she is introduced in some way into the sanctuary of the Divinity, where by way of negation or of sublime ignorance she contemplates the mysteries of the uncreated Wisdom. She is the *secretary* of God, because the divine secrets are impressed on her by *species intelligibiles* (intellectual figures) of a superior order and by a very pure supernatural light. These two thoughts succeed each other without being confounded in the developments of him who is called the Ecstatic Doctor. Indeed, according to him, the soul in this state is admirably disposed to receive divine lights, interior sweetnesses, divine consolations, in such sort that there is nothing for it more easy, more sweet, more familiar than to rise to the knowledge of divine things by contemplation and love.

In this state of secret and dark vision a very intense and intimate fire strips the soul of vile and terrestrial images and places its faculties at a height where nothing created can trouble its repose. It is the abyss of the Divinity. God has no longer anything to hide from the soul, *confidante* of His secrets; for she enters into the sojourn of light, peaceful, sweet, and true, to contemplate the glory of the Holy Trinity, His immanent processions, His light, His love, His enjoyment, and His most delicious, most happy, and most holy unity.

In the presence of this infinite and immense Good, all creatures appear as nothing. God alone becomes our consolation and our love. The soul springs with a holy ardor towards this place of repose, where she tastes the delights of ecstatic and inflamed love; in this perception by the way of negation she mounts towards the incomprehensible in the midst of a resplendent darkness, of a wise ignorance, where she is lost and confounded with the hierarchy of celestial spirits in an ocean of light.

3. But how does this admirable communication of divine lights operate? How does the soul receive the imprint of God? It is by love, light, and life that the soul becomes the *secretary* of God. The sacred ardors of the Spirit of love are poured into the heart and engraven there with characters of fire; for they enlighten with a most pure and penetrating light the *species intelligibiles* which minister to this supereminent Knowledge. The Divine Darkness becomes a resplendent focus of light. Such is, in short,

the picture that Denis the Carthusian draws for us of the effects of the gift of Wisdom in the superior degrees of infused contemplation. We give only a colorless sketch of his magnificent exposition, but it will suffice to kindle the desire to draw at the source.

May we be permitted to add here a complementary picture drawn from John Ruysbroeck, favorite author of Denis the Carthusian, the celebrated contemplative of the fourteenth century?

4. "The seventh gift of the Holy Ghost," says Ruysbroeck, "is the gift of Wisdom, savor most sweet, which we taste in the height of the soul, and which penetrates the intelligence and the will in the measure that those faculties gather themselves into this elevated abode. This wisdom, or this immense and inexhaustible savor, springs up from the depth of the just soul to spread itself to the most intimate of our powers according to their capacities, and even to the sensible part, which it gladdens with a delicate touch: the exterior senses, the hearing and the sight, take pleasure also in the beauties of nature, and in all the things that God has done for man. This divine sweetness is by its immensity far above our spirit. It is

the Holy Ghost, incomprehensible love of God, who is imparted to us. His gifts are created, finished and measured, but because our powers are suspended and drawn towards God, they are all filled with those divine outpourings, and overflow. Now, God the Father raises the recollected soul to this fruitive union. He accords her this high contemplation in the loss and forgetfulness of herself, which merits for her to be the throne and the resting-place of God. The Son, the Divine and Eternal Word, enlightens the intelligence with His own light, so that the soul may contemplate Him whom she enjoys. Finally, the Holy Ghost comes to enrich the will, which holds in itself all our faculties grouped in unity, in order that the soul may know, taste, and see how sweet the Lord is. This happiness is so great and immense, that for those who taste it, heaven, earth, and all that they contain seem to disappear and return to nothingness. The delights of this sweetness make themselves felt on high, below, within, without; the entire kingdom of the soul is penetrated with them. Hence the soul contemplates with an eager regard this divine simplicity, whence flow such great delights. This is the starting-point of a new light.

Nevertheless, the soul knows that she can never grasp or know perfectly this sweet simplicity, for it is by a created light that she contemplates. However, her joy is immense, and she feels herself lost in the heights of contemplation. Transformed by this immense brightness, she cannot detach her regards from the incomprehensible objects that procure for her so great a happiness.

5. "The faithful soul, in the contemplation to which God raises her by the gift of Wisdom, created light, and by high intellectual conceptions, straight off feels marvellous effects, which fill her with joy. She comprehends that He whom she loves is immense, and that no creature can know Him as He is in Himself. She sees that He is so sublime that no spirit can attain to Him, that He is so simple that all multiplicity has in Him its beginning and its end. She contemplates all in Him: beauty, riches, magnificence, life, victory, crown, health, peace, security, beatitude, consolation, sweetness, joy, jubilation, reward, fervor, power, divinity, eternity, goodness, liberality, charity, nobility, purity, fecundity, virtue, wisdom, stability, fidelity, truth, holiness, heat, light, satiety, strength, justice. All these per-

fections appear to her illumined by a divine light. They are, meanwhile, only very perfect intellectual figures, that is to say, forms created to the image and likeness of God. Those forms, or figures, copied after the divine nature, come from the depth of the abyss wherein God dwells, and lead to it the soul that has received them. This contemplation has limits, for God is essentially simple and incomprehensible. God," adds Ruysbroeck, "shows His kingdom to perfect and heroic souls in the light of grace and in that of glory, that which has place above the ordinary manner of knowing, and above what can be said in the Scriptures; but these cannot express those sweet truths with the same clearness, perfection, and life. In this extraordinary contemplation God discloses to the soul sublime things in the midst of the divine fires of His love; for this kingdom revealed to the soul inflamed by the divine Wisdom, fruit and delight of all virtue, is the nourishment of angels, saints, and perfect souls. Many practise certain virtues; but without divine charity they do not taste the delights of it. Others unite charity to virtues; but because they have not the gift of Wisdom in its highest degree, they do not taste the fruits of it in a sufficiently complete manner. To enjoy those sweet truths in this sublime kingdom, God must draw us by a perfect communication of the gift of Wisdom and raise us to the height of the soul, where dwells life, superessential, adherent, manifest, and communicative.

EIGHTH CONFERENCE

Teachings on the Other Formal Elicitive Principles of Infused Contemplation (I)

1. After the gift of Wisdom comes Understanding, the second among the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation. The gift of Understanding, as we have said, has for its end to make us comprehend and penetrate truths that are above the powers of our nature. In infused contemplation this supernatural light is so sublime that the soul, lifted in some manner above the condition of man, begins to share in the privilege of the angels in the midst of celestial light. The gift of Understanding, in its highest degree, enables the soul to penetrate as far as possible into the inmost secrets of God.

This contemplation demands a double action of the Holy Ghost: the knowledge or penetration of things of the supernatural order, and a sound and sweet judgment upon those truths. The gift of Understanding operates in us the former of those influences; the gift of Wisdom, the latter. The gift of Understanding is, therefore, the inseparable companion of the gift of Wisdom in the elevations of the soul to God. It is of all the gifts of the Holy Ghost that which comes nearest to it in dignity, and we can consider it, after the gift of Wisdom, as one of the most powerful formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation.

2. Let us see now what are its effects in infused contemplation. God explained one day to St. Catherine of Siena the admirable effects of the gift of Understanding. Some passages, it is true, concern the general and ordinary effects of this divine gift, but most often it is of a most sublime manifestation of the gift of Understanding that there is question. We shall recognize it easily in the text we are about to cite. "It is with this light," God said to her, "that St. Thomas of Aquin saw Me, and that he acquired the lights of his knowledge, as did also St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and My other holy Doctors. They were enlightened from on high and comprehended in the darkness My truth, that is to say, Holy Scripture, which appears obscure, not through any inherent defect

in Scripture, but through the ignorance of him who does not understand it. I have also given those lamps to enlighten the blind and gross intelligences, in order that man may know the truth amid darkness. I, the fire that consumes the sacrifice, have enraptured them by giving them the supernatural light which made the truth be known in darkness, and then what is made evident for the ignorant as well as for the learned. Each one receives the light according to his capacity and the preparation he makes to know Me: for I do not undervalue the good dispositions of any man. The understanding receives an infused light through grace, superior to the natural light, a light with which the holy Doctors and My other servants have known the light in the darkness; from darkness is come the light, for Understanding was formed before the Scripture: from Understanding comes knowledge, since it is in seeing that one discerns.

"With this light the prophets saw the future and the death of My Son; the Apostles possessed it after the descent of the Holy Ghost; the evangelists, doctors, confessors, virgins, martyrs, were all enlightened by it; all received it according as their salvation, the salvation of souls, and the teaching of the Holy Scripture required it. The Doctors received it to explain the doctrine of My Truth, the preaching of the Apostles, and the texts of the evangelists: the martyrs, to manifest by their blood the light of faith, the treasure and the fruit of the Blood of the Lamb: the virgins showed it by charity and purity. The obedient made to shine the obedience of the Word, that perfect obedience which My Son embraced in undergoing the ignominious death of the cross. This light is seen in the Old and in the New Testament—in the Old Testament, by the Prophets, whose understanding was supernaturally enlightened by grace; in the New Testament, by the evangelical life revealed to the faithful Christian . . . How is the Truth known? By the supernatural light which is given to him who is willing to receive it through My grace."

There is in this passage of the Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena a truly sublime exposition of the extraordinary effects of the gift of Understanding. It is a supernatural and infused light, by which we penetrate and search into the truth. In many cases this light serves not only for him who receives it, but is also given for the salvation of souls, the teaching and explanation of the doctrine of truth.

3. Here, without going out of the influence, all divine, of the Holy Ghost, we enter into a new category of heavenly gifts, which theologians call gratuitously given graces. But first, let us speak of the other gifts of the Holy Ghost. The gifts of Counsel, Piety, Fortitude, and Fear are not counted among the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation. Nevertheless, they dispose us to receive this favor. We must not forget that infused contemplation is the daughter of divine charity. Now, the gifts of Counsel, Piety, Fortitude, and Fear, in perfecting the will and rendering it supple and docile under the impulse of divine grace, work efficaciously to increase in us this divine charity; they aid us to acquire certain remote dispositions requisite for contemplation, and thus render us more fit to profit at the opportune time by the lights of the gifts of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding.

We shall not repeat here what we said in a former conference of the superior mode of action of the gifts of Counsel, Piety, Fortitude, and Fear. We cannot doubt their importance in the work of the sanctification of souls.

We ought then to ask God indistinctively the seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, but above all beg His infinite Goodness to increase in us the gifts of Wisdom and Understanding, since their action is more immediate and admirable in the act of infused contemplation.

Although the *gratuitously given graces* are not ordinarily counted among the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation, certain ones may be accorded to just souls in view of general and indistinct contemplation; but they are not precisely necessary for the accomplishment of this supernatural act. They simply help to render it more complete and perfect, by disposing the soul in a secondary manner for a more intimate union with God.

The *gratuitously given graces* have not always this providential rôle. There are, in fact, two sorts of grace—the one which unites man to God, and which we call sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*); the other, which we call gratuitously given grace (*gratia gratis data*), and which is not given to man to sanctify him, but rather that he may co-operate in the sanctification of others. In this latter case the *gratuitously given graces,* taken alone and outside of the state of grace, cannot be counted among the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation. This contemplation draws its essential perfection from elsewhere; it presupposes sanctifying grace and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, for there is question of a loving knowledge which has charity for its principle and end.

This leads us to the question as to how we can divide and classify the gratuituosly given graces. St. Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians divides them thus: "To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom; and to another, the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another, faith in the same Spirit; to another, the grace of healing in one Spirit; to another, the working of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, the discerning of spirits; to another, diverse kinds of tongues; to another, interpretation of speeches." (1 Cor. xii, 8–10.)

Here is the classification of gratuitously given graces according to St. Thomas: "These graces have all for their end to enable us to cooperate in the sanctification of our neighbor. Now, to this end we must reunite three conditions: (a) a profound knowledge of divine things, (b) an efficacious means of confirming and proving them, (c) the possibility of presenting them suitably to one's hearers. To the knowledge of divine things corresponds (a) *faith,* which is the certitude of invisible things; (b) *wisdom,* which is the perception of divine things; (c) *knowledge,* which is the perception of human things. In order to confirm the divine doctrine, he who teaches must do what God can do by *healing* and *miracles* properly so called, by *prophecies* and *discernment of spirits.* The manifestation of thought relates to the idiom one employs, and it is the *gift of tongues,* or to the true sense of the texts to be explained, and this is, *interpretation of speeches.*" Four of those gratuitously given graces can become, by their union with divine charity, formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation: these are the gifts of Knowledge, Wisdom, Faith, and Prophecy.

4. Here we are tempted to ask: Does the gratuitously given grace of Knowledge raise us to a higher degree of contemplation than the gift of the Holy Ghost which corresponds to it? The Holy Ghost proportions His communications to the needs of souls and of His Church. This is why He accords to those who are called to labor for the salvation of their

brethren exceptional graces, in order that they may the more easily convince and persuade them. It cannot be doubted, therefore, that the Holy Ghost sometimes imparts more abundant lights by the gratuitously given grace of Knowledge in order that they may thereby more easily manifest divine things by means of creatures and human perceptions. In the same way the gratuitously given grace of Wisdom raises souls to a supereminent degree in the contemplation of divine things. In fact, those who know mysteries most profoundly can make them known more completely to others. This degree of Wisdom is not common to all contemplative souls; ordinarily, it suffices for them to receive the gift of Wisdom in the degree necessary to their own sanctification.

NINTH CONFERENCE

Teachings on the Other Formal Elicitive Principles of Infused Contemplation (II)

1. It has been asked, Has infused knowledge some relation with the gratuitously given graces of Knowledge and Wisdom?

Infused knowledge is certainly a gratuitously given grace, but this grace is of an order altogether exceptional and excessively rare. It was accorded in its plenitude to our Lord Jesus Christ, and in an admirable and supereminent, although limited, manner to the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Thomas teaches that Adam had received it for things of the natural as well as of the supernatural order, in as much as this was necessary to him as head of the human race. Solomon and the Apostles also received this grace in a large measure. Infused knowledge is sometimes entirely supernatural, and in that case surpasses the human faculties and has God alone for its author and source.

At other times knowledge is infused as to the manner of acquiring it, without absolutely exceeding the capacities of nature: in this case it indicates solely a special help in the acquisition and application of knowledge.

Infused knowledge may constitute a habitual state or it may be solely a transitory help. Infused knowledge, universal and habitual, was the exclusive privilege of the Sacred Humanity of Christ. It is a pious belief that the Blessed Virgin was favored with habitual infused knowledge of certain matters to an eminent degree and conformably to her dignity of Mother of God and to the rank she occupied in the divine plan as Queen of angels and Mother of men. As to the Saints, who received infused knowledge in different degrees, the greater number of authors affirm that it was imparted to them in a more or less transitory manner. They cite more particularly St. Bernard, St. Louis of Toulouse, Blessed Albert the Great, St. Thomas of Aquin, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas of Villanova, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa, and St. Rose of Lima. Although infused knowledge be accorded to the saints only in a transitory manner (*per modum actus,* as the theologians say), they can, nevertheless, discourse at will on the things they have thus learned. There is then no longer question of acquiring outside of the laws of nature, or by a special help; it is a purely exterior manifestation of objects already known in a supernatural but transitory way.

2. Another gratuitously given grace is that which is called the gift of *Faith*. This is a grace of certitude which holds the middle between the obscurity of faith and clear vision. What the angels have seen face to face in the Uncreated Light, is imparted by their ministry to souls who have to fulfill some supernatural mission. It is thus that Moses received the Law by the ministry of angels on the summit of Mount Sinai: God spoke to him *face to face,* that is to say, in an eminent and familiar contemplation, which we must place immediately below the vision of the Divine Essence. This heavenly inspiration carries with it a great certitude, and it should be thus, for there is question of knowing and affirming divine communications with a full and entire security. The gift of Faith corresponds to the sixth beatitude, and to the gift of Understanding.

3. The gift of *Prophecy* is the last of the gratuitously given gifts. Taken in its full ex-

tent it consists in penetrating and making known things that are known to God only. In a more particular and strict acceptation it is a revelation of future events. According to St. Thomas, the prophetic knowledge, being an effect of divine light, can show us all things, divine as well as human, spiritual as well as corporal. It is thus that it was given to Isaias to see the excellence of God and the ministry of angels. "I saw," he says, "the Lord sitting upon a throne high and elevated, and His train filled the temple. Upon it stood the Seraphim; the one had six wings, and the other had six wings. With two they covered His face, and with two they covered His feet, and with two they flew. And they cried one to another and said: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God of hosts; all the earth is full of His glory.' And the lintels of the doors were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke." (Is. vi, 1–4.)

In what concerns natural bodies, Isaias tells us again: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and weighed the heavens with His palm? Who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" (Is. xl, 12.) As regards morals: "Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house: when thou shalt see one naked, cover him, and despise not thy own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall speedily arise, and thy justice shall go before thy face, and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear. Thou shalt cry, and He shall say: 'Here I am.'" (Is. lviii, 7–9.)

Finally, it comprises future events: "These two things shall come upon thee suddenly in one day, barrenness and widowhood." (Is. xlvii, 9.)

4. We must remark that the farther removed from human knowledge an object is, the more it becomes the proper object of prophecy—a thing that establishes three different degrees: the first contains things unknown to a man in particular because he can neither see nor understand them, but which can be known by others. It was thus that Eliseus knew prophetically what his disciple Giezi had done in his absence. It is thus also that the thoughts of the heart can be made known prophetically. In

this manner what one knows by demonstration, another can know by revelation.

The second degree comprises truths which surpass generally the knowledge of all men, not because they are not susceptible of being known in themselves, but because we cannot attain to them. Such is the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

The third degree contains those things that escape the knowledge of all men, because they cannot be known in themselves, as are future contingent events. It is particularly from this that prophecy takes its name. Now the gift of Prophecy can become on the same title as the other gratuitously given graces of which we have spoken, one of the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation. In comparing the first two degrees of the gift of Prophecy, explained above, with the graces of *Knowledge, Wisdom, Faith,* and even of infused knowledge, it is easy to remark the perfect resemblance that exists between those different sources of light. Those graces are nothing else than the prophetic light in its universal sense. We can say, then, that the gift of Prophecy is one of the formal elicitive principles of infused contemplation. When there is question of the revelation of future things, or of prophecy proper, it is always God who enlightens: the object alone is changed.

The prophetic light acts manifestly in revelations and in certain visions. According to many authors, this light is produced also in an ineffable manner in a very sublime contemplation of God, when darkness disappears to give place to a commencement of celestial light. It is not yet the light of glory. It is more than the light of faith, more than the light of wisdom. It is a light which is called prophetic (a certain supereminent light). This light, accompanied by very perfect infused figures (*species infusae*), comes under the influence of a special grace to strengthen and increase the light of faith and of wisdom. The soul no longer contemplates God by way of negation or affirmation, but by a very simple, tranquil, and lucid regard and intuition.

5. Let us here interrupt these conferences and conclude this volume by speaking of the Light of Glory.

According to St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and others, this signal favor was accorded to Moses and to St. Paul. The same privilege was due by right to the Blessed Mother. Some authors go so far as to believe that at all times there are to be found souls favored with this grace in the highest degrees of contemplation. Whatever may be the value of this opinion, we must acknowledge that with the saints the beatific vision has been only transitory. Our Lord Jesus Christ alone enjoyed it habitually here below. Let us be permitted to cite a fact that occurred to St. Catherine of Siena in support of the opinion of St. Thomas on the possibility of the transitory act of beatific vision in this world. Interrogated on this fact by Blessed Raymond of Capua, her confessor, she replied, among other things: "Yes, be assured of it; the heart that is in this feeble body was broken by charity: it was divided in two, and it seems to me I still feel within me the place of its separation. By consequence, my soul truly quitted my body, and I have seen the secrets of God, which it is impossible to describe on earth. . . . Love was strong as death. Yes, my heart was broken: my soul freed itself from its bonds! But, alas! it was only for a very short time. . . . The persons who were witnesses of my death say that I remained four hours before returning to life. Be then assured that I have seen the Divine Essence, and it is for that I suffer so much at remaining enchained in my body."

St. Catherine speaks elsewhere of the nature of this divine vision, as we can see in a letter she wrote to the same Blessed Raymond, where she recalls this fact in speaking of another ecstasy: "I was thrown down, and when I was on the ground, it seemed to me that my soul had quitted my body, not as when it quitted it in fact, and I tasted the happiness of the blessed by enjoying with them the Sovereign Good: but then it seemed to me that I was a distinct and separate thing; my body did not appear to be mine, but another's." In comparing those two texts of St. Catherine of Siena, we find not only the affirmation of the same fact, but its explanation conformably to the doctrine of St. Thomas. In fact, if the Saint says: "My soul indeed quitted my body," she adds: "It seemed to me that my soul had quitted my body." All is explained: she had seen God, as if she had been dead.

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